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Fantastic

JULY
20c

ADVENTURES

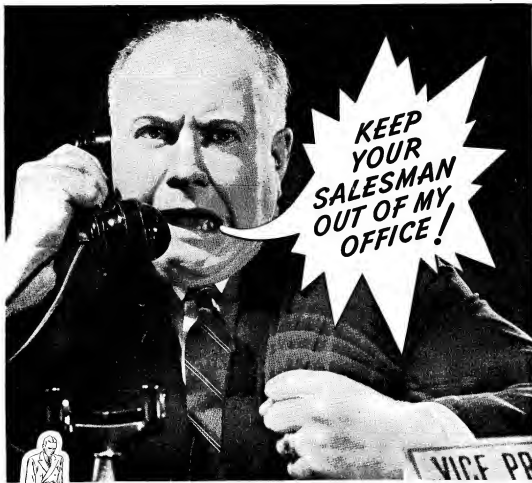
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Daring Attempt
To Steal The Earth

**Invaders
From Sirius**

by **ED EARL REPP**



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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WE ARE proud to present the second issue of **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES**; proud for several reasons. First: because the first issue was so well received; and second: because our readers came so royally to our aid with a deluge of comments and suggestions for further improvement of the magazine they have acclaimed as the finest magazine in science fiction.

In our sister magazine, **AMAZING STORIES**, we've gained the reputation of being willing to give our readers what they want. We have a policy of lending a listening ear to the voice of the reader, delving deep into the undercurrent of majority opinion, and acting immediately a definite want is made known. Therefore, you will no doubt notice many changes in the format and make-up of this second big issue. We know you'll like them all. And many thanks to you for becoming such able correspondence editors!

THE third reason to be proud is the splendid line-up of stories and writers we are able to present you with this issue. Leading off is the greatest surprise of the year, Edgar Rice Burroughs' latest novel, "The Scientists Revolt." Here is something really unusual in Burroughs fantasies. If this yarn doesn't grip you with every word, by reason of its dramatic tenseness, mystery, and future science, we will personally eat the manuscript atop the trylon of the New York World's Fair.

Add to that, Nelson S. Bond, John Russell Fearn, Thornton Ayre, Ed Earl Repp and Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr., and you've got one of the finest line-ups of favorite writers ever to appear in one single issue of any magazine! You told us you liked our first issue; now we're telling you you'll like this one. Don't say we didn't warn you when you settle down in that easy chair and launch yourself into some real entertainment!

THERE'S been a lot of talk lately about electron microscopes and electron telescopes. Even that by the time the new 200-inch telescope swings into action, it will be outmoded by an instrument that will equal in efficiency a 2000-inch mirror! That's big talk, but reasonable and possible enough to warrant some serious consideration.

The operation of such telescopes is something on the following order: photo electric cells would pick up the light of distant stars, convert it into electrical energy, or streams of electrons, and amplify it by a series of amplifier tubes. Then this greatly amplified stream of electrons would be reconverted into light rays. It has been stated by several scientific publications that it is reasonable to believe that such light rays could be stepped up in this manner by the equivalent of the reflecting power of a 2000" mirror. Use your square on that, and you've got something!

But there is a stopper that will offer a real obstacle and that is the simple fact that a photo-electric cell isn't quite capable of such a power miracle. In fact, G. E. has one capable of developing four ten-millionths of a horse power. That's not enough. And add to that the terrific loss of power by even the best of wires. In short, the 200" telescope will more than likely get in quite a few "licks" before the electron variety pushes it into the background.



"You're too late, Professor. The patent rights are all in my name!"

FANTASTIC indeed is the news that a tiny motor-boat, shrouded in utmost secrecy as to design and armament, is capable of sinking even a giant dreadnaught. Vest pocket torpedo boats, they are being called. Facts now uncovered indicate it is an apt name. They are 65½ feet long, 15.09 feet wide, and displace 31 tons. They have four 680 horsepower motors, and have fuel capacity for a four-day voyage. Speed is indicated as 47 knots. They are constructed of mahogany and oak. Rumor also has it that they possess two torpedoes, anti-aircraft rifle, turret-type machine gun, and a dozen depth bombs. If it is true that a tiny craft costing less than \$180,000 and manned by only nine men has outmoded the battleship, then indeed is science outstripping itself. Maybe the weapons of the future will not be grand-scale things, but tiny hornets of devastation.

IS science fiction really in the public fancy? That's a question that is being answered in a number of very convincing ways. First, in addition to the magazines publishing it, is a new source of publicity, the radio. We've had an increasing number of science fiction yarns on the air. Most famous, without a doubt, is Orson Welles' serio-

(Continued on page 65)

Fantastic

ADVENTURES

Contents

VOLUME 1
NUMBER 2
JULY
1939



Strange power was in this giant globe, and into it went a daring pair, to visit an amazing world in another dimension of time.
Coming Soon!



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VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2

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STORIES

- THE SCIENTISTS REVOLT**..... Edgar Rice Burroughs 8
A half-mile above city streets mystery and murder stalk a scientific penthouse, and Macklin Donovan faces unknown and deadly science.
- THE GOLDEN AMAZON**..... Thornton Ayre 32
An amazing girl with the strength of ten men comes to earth to destroy an observatory. Then Chris Wilson follows her into space.
- THE MONSTER FROM NOWHERE**..... Nelson S. Bond 46
What was this fantastic creature out of another dimension, that snatched men into nothingness? Ki Patterson wanted to find out.
- INTRIGUE IN LEMURIA**..... Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr. 56
Kirk, the Wanderer, gazes into a cup of wine—and wakes to battle for a Queen's honor in a strange land that time and space forgot.
- SHE WALKED ALONE**..... John Russell Fearn 66
What black cloud of menace hung over Elaine Dodd, and why did she hate the moon? What danger could there be in trying to face it?
- INVADERS FROM SIRIUS**..... Ed Earl Repp 74
Out of space came an invader, and the earth swung ominously from its orbit. Then Webb Saunders found a weird cavern in Utah...

FEATURES

- The Editor's Notebook..... 4
- Romance of the Elements..... 31
- The Tipping Earth..... 44
- Coming Next Issue..... 45
- Fantastic Hoaxes..... 54
- Amazing Stories..... 73
- Story Contest..... 87
- Introducing The Author..... 88
- Quiz Page..... 90
- Reader's Page..... 91
- The Man From Venus..... 97
- Books..... 98

Front cover painting by Leo Morey, depicting a scene in *Invaders From Sirius*.
Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul

Illustrations by: Julian S. Krupa, Robert Fuqua, Leo Morey, Jay Jackson and Kenneth J. Reeve



On the balcony outside perched a dark figure, a gleaming dagger poised for a throw

REVOLT

BY
EDGAR RICE
BURROUGHS

Mackie Donovan, American, plunges into the greatest adventure of his life, high in an amazing tower of scientific mystery where killers vanish into thin air

PROLOGUE—2190 A.D.

A SMALL pane in the leaded glass of the Pent House Palace atop the tallest building in Assuria tinkled to the study floor as the bullet embedded itself in the ebony paneling behind the Science Ruler.

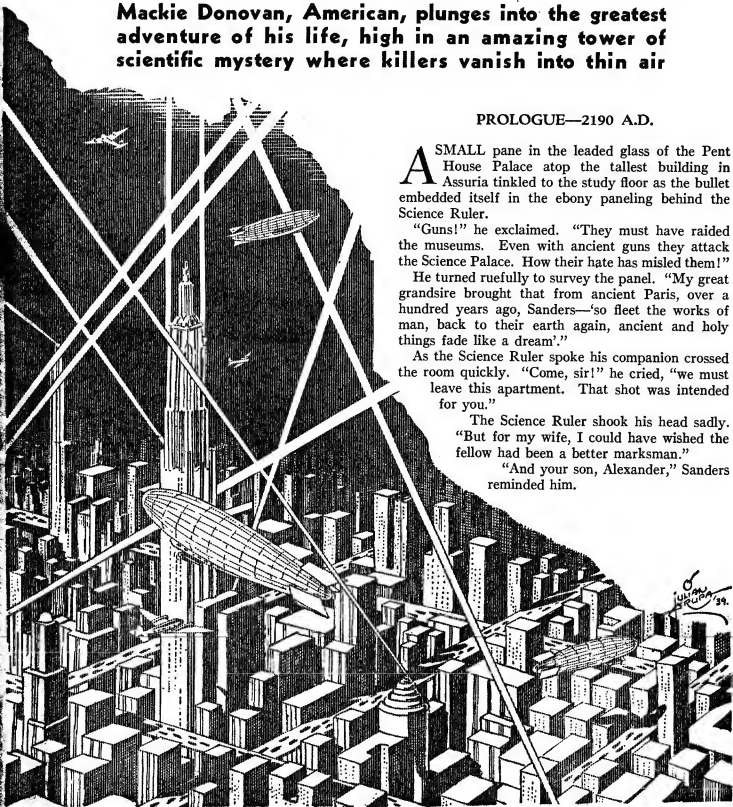
"Guns!" he exclaimed. "They must have raided the museums. Even with ancient guns they attack the Science Palace. How their hate has misled them!"

He turned ruefully to survey the panel. "My great grandsire brought that from ancient Paris, over a hundred years ago, Sanders—'so fleet the works of man, back to their earth again, ancient and holy things fade like a dream'."

As the Science Ruler spoke his companion crossed the room quickly. "Come, sir!" he cried, "we must leave this apartment. That shot was intended for you."

The Science Ruler shook his head sadly. "But for my wife, I could have wished the fellow had been a better marksman."

"And your son, Alexander," Sanders reminded him.



"It might make it easier for him," replied the Science Ruler. "It is I they hate. My people hate me, Sanders—my people whom I love and to whom I have tried to be a father. But them I cannot blame. They have been deceived by lies. It is toward those who knew the truth, who lived closest to me, and for whom I did the most that I feel any bitterness. Every day they are deserting me, Sanders—the rats and the sinking ship. I am sure of only a few of you—I could count my friends tonight upon the fingers of one hand."

Michael Sanders, Minister of War, bowed his head, for the Science Ruler had spoken the truth and there was no denial to be made.

It was the first of May preceding that historic second which wiped the science dynasty from the rule of Assuria. For a month the Science family had virtually been prisoners in the summer palace upon the outskirts of the Capitol, but they had been unmolested and their personal safety had seemed reasonably assured until this morning.

For years the voice of the agitator and the malcontent had been heard with increasing emphasis throughout the length and breadth of the Country. "We are slaves to science" was the text from which they preached. During the early weeks of April the Capitol had been a hotbed of revolution which had rapidly merged into the chaos of anarchy. The people had grievances, but no leader—they had only agitators, who could arouse, but not control.

And then had come this first of May, when the rabble from the low quarters of the city, drunk with liquor and with blood lust, had derided the weaklings at the head of the revolution, and screaming for blood and loot, had marched upon the Science palace with the avowed intention of assassinating the Science family.

All that day they had howled and hooted about the palace, held in check only by a single military unit which had remained loyal to the Scientists—the Foreign Corps, recruited among foreigners, and with few exceptions, similarly officered.

After a moment's silence, the Science Ruler spoke again.

"What do you suppose started them today?" he asked. "What brought this mob to the palace?"

"They heard last night of the birth of your son," replied Sanders. "They pretend to see in that fact a menace to what they are pleased to call The New Freedom—that is why they are here, sir."

"You think they want the lives of my wife and son, as well as my life?"

Sanders bowed. "I am sure of it, sir."

"That must be prevented at all cost," said the Science Ruler.

"I had thought of removing them from the palace," replied Sanders, "but that would be difficult, even were it possible to move your wife, which the physicians assure me must not be done. But there is just a faint possibility that we may be able to remove the

baby boy. I have given the matter a great deal of thought, sir. I have a plan. It entails risk, but on the other hand, to permit the boy to remain in this building another twelve hours would, I am confident, prove fatal."

"Your plan, Sanders, what is it?" demanded the Scientist.

"FOR the past month the officers of The Foreign Corps have been quartered within the building. Several of them are married men, and their wives are here with them. One of these women, the wife of a Lieut. Donovan, gave birth to a son two days since. She is a strong and healthy young woman and could be moved without materially endangering her health. For all the people know, she may have had twins."

The Science Ruler elevated his brows. "I see," he said, "but how could she pass out with the infants? No one may escape."

"But they do daily, sir," replied Sanders. "The building is filled with traitors. Not a day passes but that several desert to the enemy. We are close pressed. Only a miracle can save The Foreign Corps from absolute extermination. It would not seem strange, then, to the revolutionists, should Lieut. Donovan desert to them, for the sake of the safety of his wife and children."

For several minutes the Science Ruler stood with bowed head, buried in thought. Then: "Call Danard," he said, "and we will send for this Lieut. Donovan." "Perhaps I had better go myself," said Sanders. "The fewer who know of what we intend, the safer will be the secret."

"I have implicit confidence in Danard," replied the Science Chief. "He has served me faithfully for many years."

"Pardon, sir," said Sanders, "but the occasion is one of such tremendous moment that I would be untrue to the trust you repose in me, were I to remain silent—sir, I fear Danard, I mistrust him, I have no confidence in him."

"Why?"

"I could substantiate no charge against him," replied Sanders, "or I should have preferred charges long ago, yet..."

"Poof!" exclaimed the Science Ruler. "Danard would die for me. Bring him, please."

Sanders moved toward the radio call, but with his hand upon the switch he turned again.

"I beg of you, sir, to let me go instead."

The elder man replied with an imperious gesture toward the radio call and Sanders gave the signal. A few moments later, Paul Danard, the Science Ruler's valet, entered the chamber. He was a slender, dark man, apparently in his early thirties. His eyes were large and dreamy and set rather too far apart, while, in marked contrast to them, were his thin, aquiline nose and his straight and bloodless lips. He awaited in silence the will of his master, who stood scrutinizing him closely, as though for the first time he had

seen the face of the man before him. Presently, however, the Science Ruler spoke.

"Danard," he said, "you've served me faithfully for many years. I have implicit confidence in your loyalty, and because of that I am going to place within your hands tonight the future of Assuria and the safety of my son."

The man bowed low. "My life is yours to command," he replied.

"Good. The mob seeks my life and that of my wife, and of Alexander. Even if I could leave the palace I would not. My wife, on account of her condition, cannot, but Michael believes that we can smuggle the boy away where he may remain in safety and seclusion until the deluded people have recovered from the madness which grips them now."

Michael Sanders watching intently the face of the valet, saw reflected there no emotion which might arouse the slightest suspicion, as the Science Ruler outlined the plan which might cheat the revolutionists of the fruit of their endeavor.

TWENTY minutes later Danard returned with Lieut. Terrance Donovan, a young Irish soldier of fortune who had been a Lieutenant in The Foreign Corps for better than a year.

Michael explained the plan to the officer.

"The most difficult part," he concluded, "will be in obtaining safe escort for your wife and the two infants through the revolutionists who surround the building, but that is a chance that we must take, for in their present mood they will spare no one once they gain access to the building, which now can be but a matter of hours.

"Once you have gained the city remain in hiding until your wife's strength is equal to travel, then leave the country. Go to America where funds will be sent you periodically for the care and education of the boy. From time to time you will receive instructions from us, but you will make no reports unless requested, nor attempt in any way to communicate with us, for only by maintaining the utmost secrecy may we hope to preserve the boy from the vengeance of the revolutionists. To prevent suspicion from attaching to you in any way upon the other side you must pursue some calling that may at least partially account for your income.

"His father, his mother, Danard, your wife, yourself and I are the only people who will know the identity of your second twin. No other must ever know until you receive authoritative word from Assuria that the time is ripe for his return to his people. Not even the boy himself must know that he is other than your son. Do you understand fully and do you accept the commission?"

Donovan inclined his head in assent.

"We are placing in your hands the fate of Assuria," said the Science Ruler; "God grant that you may be true to the trust imposed upon you."

"I shall not fail you, sir," replied the Irishman.

Twenty-four hours later the rabble overcame the remaining guards and forced its way into the Science building. The fate of the Science Ruler and his wife is not known—their bodies were never found. The rage of the revolutionists when they discovered that the infant son had been spirited away was unbounded. But all this is history. If you are interested in it I recommend to you *The Last Days of the Scientists**, by Michael Sanders, large 12mo, illus., 529 pgs., G. Strake, Ltd., London.

IT was the sixteenth of May, two weeks after the fall of the Science Rule, that a tiny, muffled figure, with a weight at its feet, dropped from the stratosphere liner Colossic bound for New York. The Atlantic, below, received it. Watching, with tragic eyes, stood a young Irishman. At his side, sobbing softly, his wife clutched a little baby tightly to her breast.

CHAPTER I

Twenty-Two Years Later

"YOUR Ma is a very sick woman, Mackie." The older man, sitting at his desk, did not raise his eyes to his son as he spoke, and the other knew that it was because he feared to reveal the emotion that lay behind them, and thus give the boy greater cause for apprehension.

"I guessed as much when I got your message, Dad," and as he spoke, Macklin Donovan, arose. Walking to his father's side he laid his hand affectionately and sympathetically upon the broad shoulder of the stratosphere lieutenant. "May I see her?" he asked.

"That is all, Mackie—just see her," replied his father. "She won't know you. The doctor has ordered absolute quiet."

The younger man nodded, and together they tip-

*Late in the twenty-first century, all of Europe became involved in a war from which emerged a scientific power that ruled the whole continent with an iron hand. It was not a dictatorial, or an unjust rule, since by scientific means, the lot of the people was materially bettered. Under the Science Rule, the country grew prosperous, and it seemed that happiness should certainly have been the lot of the people. But instead, there was constant murmuring against the rule of man by science, for it was a fact that machines did the real thinking behind the government. Robots took the place of pilots in stratosphere planes, industry became a mass of entangling robot factories, and severe economical upheavals resulted.

However, each time, balance was restored, at least to the financial structure of the nation. But morally, the people became undermined. They had too much leisure time. In short, science had come to a continent whose people were not intellectually ready for it. They seethed beneath its irksome perfection. They yearned for something, they knew not what. And finally, came revolt. Machine was turned against machine, and as is the case with machines, when the human nerve center is cut, chaos resulted.

Driven to retreat when power beams failed, the Foreign Corps finally succumbed to such ancient weapons as rifles and flame guns. A few short days of fierce fighting and the Science Rule was at an end, perhaps forever on the European continent.

Once more Europe returned to its ancient ways, but whether they would follow the lead of still American America, the ancient, but still young in spirit, democracy, is for future historians to record. In America, science serves, it does not rule.—Excerpt from "The Last Days of the Scientists."

Macklin Donovan



toed their way upstairs to a room on the second floor.

When they returned to the den again there was a hint of moisture on the lashes of both men.

"How did you find me," asked the younger man, "through the department?"

"Yes. I telephoned Washington. Your chief told me where you were."

"I am still on the Thorn case. It's got us guessing. No one in the department believes Mr. Thorn to be more than a visionary philanthropist with conservative socialistic leanings.

"We haven't been able to identify a single avowed radical with him, yet we are sure that there is a bunch of Assurians with whom he has frequent dealings, often secretly. His son is as much mystified as we, and almighty worried, too. He thinks they are after the old man's money, and fears that they may influence him to finance some movement that will lay him liable to Federal prosecution.

"There's another angle to the whole case—something we haven't sensed yet, even faintly; but I'm going to get it. I think I'm closer to it now than I have been at any time during the past month that I've been on the case. We came down from their summer place yesterday on Mr. Thorn's yacht and things seem to have tightened up some way from the

moment we arrived. There's a sort of tenseness and air of mystery that wasn't manifest at Three Gables.

"About the only new element that seems to have been infused into the affair is Thorn's butler, a fellow named Greeves, who was not at Three Gables. None of the rest of the town servants seems to count much that I can see, but this fellow Greeves I don't like. He's always pussy-footing. I can scarcely turn around without finding him behind me. I think he suspects me and is watching me accordingly.

"The other guests, beside myself, are Mrs. Glasscock and her daughter—the Peabody Glasscocks of Philadelphia, you know—and John Saran and his daughter. As far as the Glasscocks are concerned they are out of my reckoning entirely—but the Sarans are different. They're from Assuria. He's supposed to be a political exile. I haven't a thing on him, but I've filed him in the same folder with Greeves. The girl, his daughter, is all right—very much all right, plus."

Lieutenant Terrance Donovan looked up quickly at his son and smiled. The latter grinned back at the older man, and flushed a little.

"Don't be too sure about anybody, Mackie," counseled the father. "And, anent that, are you sure about young Thorn?"

"He was the best friend I had in New Harvard," replied the son. "He asked to have me assigned to this case because he and I could work together better than strangers. He has done everything to aid me. Not a soul in the house knows who I really am. Thorn was afraid to even let 'em know that my father is a strato-police lieutenant, for fear it might arouse suspicion as to my motives for being there. They think you're a retired television king from San Francisco and that we're lousy with money. Say, if Mrs. Peabody Glasscock of Philadelphia knew the truth she'd throw a conniption."

The older man's face sobered, reflectively. "I'll say she would," he said—"if she knew the truth."

"Well, Dad," said the boy, rising, "I've got to go—that's the hell of a job like mine, and yours, too; our personal interests mustn't count."

He threw an arm about his father's shoulders affectionately. "Buck up, Dad," he said. "I'm sure Mother'll pull through all right. Keep me posted, and if I can see her when she's conscious, I'll come."

OUTSIDE he walked the half-block to the aerial taxi tower and shot aloft in an elevator to the traffic platform. Here he hailed an air-taxi and a moment later relaxed in the cushioned seat, watching the swirl of air traffic about him drop away as his own craft tore into the blue in response to his brief command "Thorn Tower."

Below, the giant hive of Lower New York, with its half-mile high buildings, housing thirty-four millions of people, drew his attention as it always did. Awe inspiring was this greatest city of Earth. Here, unlike Europe, and Asia, science had truly served, and not in a century had war come to America. Nor had any

invader done other than cast covetous eyes on the wealth that science so ably protected. America was impregnable; democracy and science together were unassailable.

And the vast majority of the thirty-four millions were happy and contented. Still, there were elements that intruded, that needed delving into. This was the mission of the Secret Service. Just such an element was the situation that now confronted Macklin Donovan. Thorn, a man with millions, and Saran, a man with a purpose. What was that purpose? American democracy needed to know the answer to such questions.

The air-taxi dropped at last to a high tower, higher than the majority bespeaking the wealth of its owners. Only one other tower in the vicinity could be compared with it, and that was a mile away. Twin needles of stone and steel they were, piercing the lower clouds and dwarfing the lesser giants around them.

Macklin Donovan stepped out on the landing roof, and dismissed the taxi. Then he walked toward the ornate and luxuriously built pent house that graced the very spire of the building.

As he approached the door was opened by a footman, just beyond whom, Donovan saw Greeves, who bowed low—much too low the Secret Service man thought—as he stepped forward to take the guest's hat.

"Thank you," responded Donovan, curtly. At the library doorway he turned quickly to see Greeves' eyes upon him. Instantly the butler turned away. There was a frown on the young man's face as he entered the room.

"My!" exclaimed a tall, blonde girl; "whatever in the world is peeving our little Mackie?"

Donovan smiled as the others looked toward him. "Happy as a lark," he assured the girl. "Sun's awful out—been frowning all afternoon to keep my eyes from sun-burning—haven't got my face straightened out yet."

John Saran was standing upon the opposite side of the room facing him. Donovan was distinctly aware that Saran's eyes were looking past him and not at him, as were the eyes of the other occupants of the library. As he advanced into the room he drew his cigarette case from his pocket and let it drop to the floor behind him. With a laughing exclamation at his awkwardness he turned quickly to pick up the case, permitting his glance to pass swiftly toward the doorway. Greeves was standing in the shadow of the hallway, a finger raised. As Donovan turned back toward the room he was still smiling—but he was the only one who knew why.

"WE'RE going back to Three Gables tomorrow, Macklin," announced his host. "Genevive has had enough of New York in the summer time."

"I thought a little of it would go a long way with her when she asked you to bring her," replied Donovan, smiling. "You are returning with us?"

Nariva Saran



The elder Thorn nodded. "Got my business all attended to. Shall be glad to get out of this heat." "Hmph!" exclaimed Miss Euphonia Thorn, his sister. "You haven't transacted a bit of business. Why in the world you wanted to drag us all down here this time of year is quite beyond me. Make us all suffer for nothing—absolutely nothing!"

"I didn't drag you down, Euphonia. As a matter of fact I tried to persuade you not to come. I know how you hate the city in summer. And as for my business, I'm a fast worker," he added with a laugh. "I'll finish up the tag ends after the rest of you are in bed tonight." He glanced at Saran then relapsed into silence. Donovan was certain that the Assurian had shot a quick warning from those deep-set, somber eyes.

"Well!" snapped Miss Euphonia, rising. "I'm going to dress for dinner, and I think the rest of you had better be doing the same."

"Why, it isn't four-thirty yet, Aunt Phony," exclaimed Percy Thorn.

"I don't care what time it is and I wish you wouldn't call me Aunt Phony—it's vulgar and disrespectful. If your Grandfather was alive, but then—"

"But then—he isn't. Have a cigaret, Auntie?"

"You know I never smoke. It's unscientific and harmful. You just ask that to annoy me. It is a filthy

habit that I have never acquired."

"I didn't know that you had ever acquired any filthy habits, Auntie. But then it is a wise nephew who knows his own aunt, these days."

The angular little woman moved majestically toward the doorway. Near it she turned and faced her brother. "Mason," she announced, "I shall not remain to be insulted further."

Her brother laughed indulgently. "See you at dinner, Eu," he called after her.

"You can sneak a smoke now, Genevive," said Percy to the tall blonde.

"I have not ceased smoking," replied the girl with a shrug. "I do not take your Aunt Euphonia seriously."

"No one does except herself," replied the young man.

"I wish you *would* cease smoking occasionally, Genevive," reproved her mother. "Nariva never smokes, although she comes from a country where the ancient habit has been fully revived, and she seems to be just as happy."

"But I do not enjoy smoking," exclaimed Miss Saran. "I'm sure that I should smoke if I did enjoy it."

The tall Miss Glasscock arose from her chair, languidly, and walked to Donovan's side. "Do you think I smoke too much, Mackie?" she inquired, purring, placing a hand softly upon his arm.

Mrs. Glasscock beamed. "Oh, those children!" she exclaimed. "It doesn't make any difference what I think, or what anyone else thinks, as long as Mackie thinks it's all right." If she sought to suggest vexation she was not entirely convincing.

Macklin Donovan was visibly ill at ease for an instant, but he laughed it off quickly. Percy Thorn appeared bored and irritated. Could looks wither, Mrs. Peabody Glasscock would have assumed the dimensions of a peanut, but she did not even guess that Percy Thorn was looking at her.

Donovan petted Genevive's hand where it lay upon his sleeve. "I'm sure you wouldn't do anything too much, Gene," he assured her.

Saran cast a quick glance at his daughter, caught her eye, and directed a furtive and very meaningful look toward Miss Glasscock and Donovan. Nariva Saran merely raised her delicate brows.

A little later the three women went to their rooms to dress. Saran excused himself presently and was soon followed by the elder Thorn. Then Percy Thorn turned to Donovan.

"Look here, Mack," he said. "What is there between you and Gene? I want to know."

"Nothing, you old fool, except the Donovan millions," and the speaker laughed. "Can't you see that she doesn't give a tinker's dam for me—that it's her mother who is egging her on?"

"I think she's in love with you," insisted Thorn.

"I want to see 'em when they learn the truth about me," said Donovan.

"You may be right about the old lady—she's after

Dad for his bank roll; but Gene—never! She's true blue, Mack. She's the real thing, and it just about does me up to see her falling in love with one of my best friends."

"Well, you ought to know your friends, Perce—if they're not fit associates for Gene you ought not to bring 'em around."

"Cut the comedy! I'm in love with her and you're not—at least you say you're not, though I don't see how you can help being—and I don't want to lose her, and I don't want to play second fiddle."

"Don't worry, Perce. It won't be for long now, unless I miss my guess. Things are coming to a head mighty quick. I have an idea that I'll learn a lot before I'm many hours older, and it may be that I can fade away then in a hurry and not gum up your love affairs with my filthy millions."

"It isn't the money, Mack—she's in love with you, I'm afraid. I've got money enough, as far as that's concerned; but she can't even see me when you're around."

"You mean when Mamma's around," corrected Donovan. "I saw her making eyes at you and rubbing up against you there at Three Gables and on the yacht every time Mamma wasn't looking."

Thorn shook his head. "I wish you were right," he said; "but you ain't. Come on, let's go up and dress." He arose and walked toward the door.

"I'll be up in a minute—you run along," replied Donovan. "I want to look around a bit."

THORN nodded and ran up the stairs that, descending from the second floor, opened into the large library. When he had gone Donovan walked quickly to the doorway leading to the hall. As he did so the heavy hangings before a doorway on the opposite side from the library moved, but the hall was dark and Donovan did not see the movement. He had scarcely reached the doorway when his attention was attracted by the sound of light footsteps on the stairway above. Turning quickly, he saw Nariva Saran descending. She halted almost at the instant that he turned, but immediately resumed her downward course. Had he surprised her? Would she have turned back had he not discovered her? He wondered.

"Ah, Mister Donovan!" she exclaimed. "I thought everyone had gone to his room. I did not expect to meet anyone," she flushed prettily.

He realized now why she might have wished to turn back unseen—she was in negligee. A very beautiful creation that set off her dark loveliness bewitchingly. Donovan stood with one hand upon the newel post as the girl descended—his back toward the hall doorway.

"I left a little bag down here," she explained. "It contained a few trinkets that I should not care to lose. Ah, there it is!" and she crossed quickly to the chair in which she had been sitting and picked up a small gold bag. As she returned to the stairway, where Donovan still stood, she paused on the lower step.

"You had better hurry and dress for dinner, Mr. Donovan," she said, with her pretty accent, "or you will be late." As she spoke she played with the little gold bag, opening it and closing it. Donovan was aware of a very delicate and delectable fragrance about her.

"What a wonderful perfume," he remarked.

The girl smiled and opened the bag again. "Yes," she said, drawing a small jeweled pin from the receptacle and holding it toward his face, "it is very wonderful. The Science Ruler of Assuria before he was assassinated gave it to my—to a friend of my father. There is no more like it in all the world. It is very old and has never been uncorked, yet it permeates whatever it comes in contact with. I just took it from my trunk today—you did not notice it before?"

"There was too much smoke in the room, I guess," he replied. Suddenly he placed his hand upon hers. "I wanted to say this afternoon, but I couldn't very well at the time, that I am glad you do not smoke."

For just an instant an eager light shone in her eyes, and then she drew back.

"I am glad," she said gently, "if I have pleased Mister Donovan."

"Pleased me! Oh, Nariva, you must know—" he drew her suddenly close him—"you must have seen that I—"

Quickly she placed a cool, soft palm across his lips. "Stop!" she cried, and her eyes looked frightened.

The heavy hangings upon the opposite side of the hallway moved. Donovan's back was toward them.

He clung to her. "I love you!" he cried, almost angrily, it seemed. "You must have known it—you must have! Why can't you love me?"

She broke away. "I *do* love you!" she exclaimed; but there was horror in her eyes and in her voice as she turned and fled up the stairway.

Donovan looked after for a moment with puzzled eyes, and then, passing his palm slowly across the back of his neck, he slowly ascended the stairs toward his room.

"The more you see of 'em, the less you know about 'em," he soliloquized as he closed his bedroom door behind him.

IN a room at the opposite end of the house and upon the other side of the hall Miss Glasscock's maid was arranging her mistress' hair, while Mrs. Glasscock sat before a dressing table appliqueing her face. "At your age I should have had him long before this," Mrs. Glasscock was remarking. "The girl of today lacks subtlety of contrivance in such matters."

Her daughter shrugged her fair shoulders. "I don't want him," she said. "I want Percy. I should think the Thorn millions would be enough."

"Genevieve, you are vulgar!" her mother rebuked. "And anyway, if I marry Mr. Thorn I can expect nothing more than my dower rights in the event of

his death, since Percy will inherit the bulk of the fortune; while Mr. Donovan, being an only child, I am told, will inherit his father's entire estate—a matter of some hundreds of millions."

ACROSS the hall from the Glassocks Nariva Saran stood before her mirror, scowling. In the doorway of her closet stood John Saran. He, too, was scowling.

"You had him then," he said in a low voice, accusingly.

The girl made no reply.

"Do not fail us again," said Saran—his tones were well modulated, but ugly. Then he stepped back into the closet and closed the door.

Nariva, her head upon one side, listened for a moment, then, almost fiercely, she pressed the back of her hand to her eyes, as one in pain. "I can't! I can't!" she murmured.

CHAPTER II

Murder in the Dark

IT was after one o'clock the following morning before they returned from supper and dancing at one of the city's popular sky gardens. Greeves admitted them. As she passed him Nariva Saran raised her brows questioningly and the butler replied with an almost imperceptible inclination of his head. Neither act would have been noticeable to other than specially trained senses—such as Donovan's. It was his business to notice such trivial occurrences and this one did not escape him. He was puzzled and vexed—vexed with himself that he could still doubt Nariva Saran's connection with the band of conspirators that he felt he was at last closing in upon after weeks of seemingly fruitless effort.

He had always suspected Saran and at first had assumed that the Assurian's daughter was criminally connected with the band of which her father was a part. Reasoning from this premise it was not strange that he should seek to ingratiate himself with the girl, that through her he might gain the knowledge he sought. To this end he sought her companionship. The result had been that not only had he been unable to connect her with any of the activities that he believed chargeable to the band under investigation, but he had fallen hopelessly in love with her.

After a few moments desultory conversation in which no one seemed interested Miss Thorn announced her intention of retiring—a suggestion that evidently met with the approval of the others, who, with sleepy "Good nights," ascended the stairway to their several chambers.

Fifteen minutes later Greeves made the rounds of the lower floor, turning off all the lights with the exception of a small night lamp in the front hallway and a second small lamp in the library, which was the last room to which he gave his attention. Instead

of returning to the servants' stairway at the rear of the penthouse which he should have used in going to his room on the fourth floor, he ascended the main stairway from the library. He left a light on the landing about half way up the stairs, but shut off all those in the hallway on the second floor, which was, however, slightly illuminated by the light from the landing.

These duties attended to he paused for a moment in the center of the hall, apparently listening. He looked quickly first in one direction and then in the other, after which, seemingly satisfied, he ascended the second flight of steps to the third floor where were located the apartments of the family. Ordinarily a small passenger elevator was used to reach the upper floors, but this was temporarily out of commission while undergoing its annual summer overhauling during the absence of the family at Three Gables. From the third floor a single flight of stairs led to the servants' quarters on the floor above.

This stairway was near the rear end of the third floor hallway. Directly opposite it was a small, dark closet wherein were kept a various assortment of brooms, brushes, mops, dusters, vacuum cleaners, and similar paraphernalia.

Greeves turned out all but a single light in the third floor hall, walked to the foot of the stairway, paused, listened, and then, turning quickly, crossed the hall silently, opened the door of the dark closet entered it and closed the door after him.

MACKLIN DONOVAN had gone directly to his room, removed his dinner coat, tie and collar, and sat down to smoke and read at a table near one of the open windows which overlooked the small garden in the rear of the house. Outside this window was a narrow iron balcony identical with those outside every other window on this floor, both front and rear. These balconies did not connect with those adjacent to them, being separated by a space of about three feet. Except for the lights of the vast city far below, and the giant twin tower a mile away, the penthouse might have been on a country estate.

Macklin's back was toward the open window and he was facing in the direction of the door leading into the hallway. He was not particularly interested in the book he was reading—it did not hold his attention. It was better than nothing however in assisting him to pass the time until the household slumbered, for he had a suspicion that something might transpire thereafter that would prove of interest to him and to his chief in Washington.

He had been sitting thus for about an hour, when his eyes alighted upon a folded paper lying on the threshold partially inside the room. It had not been there a moment before, of that he was positive. There had been no sound—the paper had not been there one minute—the next minute it had. That was all there was to it.

In the instant that he discovered the thing he

leaped quickly toward the door with the intention of throwing it open; but before his hand touched the knob he thought better of his contemplated act and, instead, stooped and picked up the paper. Whoever put it there did not want to be seen. Perhaps it would be better to humor them, temporarily at least.

Standing near the door he opened the message and read its contents, after which he was glad that he had not yielded to his first impulse to rush into the hall in an effort to discover the messenger. The note was in a feminine hand and read: "Mackie: Please come to my room at quarter past two. I have something to tell you. Do not come before," and it was signed with the initials "N.S."

Donovan's right palm went to the back of his neck in a characteristic gesture of perplexity. It wasn't like Nariva—she wasn't the sort of girl that would ask a man to her room at that hour of the morning—unless—ah, that was it! She wanted to tell him something that she didn't dare tell him before Saran. It must be that. It must be something urgent. Whatever it was it was all right—he could trust her—of that he was quite sure. He glanced at his watch. It lacked about five minutes to quarter past. He went to his dressing room, buttoned on his collar, adjusted his tie, and slipped into his dinner coat.

Before leaving his room he turned to his dresser from which he took a needle pistol.* He was on the point of slipping it into a hip pocket when he hesitated, and then, with a shrug, replaced it in the dresser and closed the drawer.

Walking toward the hall door his gaze fell upon the table. He came to an abrupt stop and, wheeling, took a hurried survey of the room, for propped against the reading lamp was a square blue envelope that had not been there when he had quitted the room a few minutes before. Snatching it up he saw his own initials crudely printed upon its face. The flap, which was but freshly sealed, he tore open, revealing an ordinary square correspondence card, upon which was printed in the same rude hand a single word: BEWARE!

A frown creased Donovan's brow. His hall door was locked. He glanced toward the open window, and then quickly at his watch. It was exactly quarter past two. Slipping the blue envelope and the card into his pocket he crossed the room to the hall door. As he laid his hand upon the knob the faint report of a needle pistol came to his ears, followed almost immediately by the sound of a body falling, and the piercing shriek of a woman.

THROWING the door open Donovan stepped out into the hall and ran quickly toward the front of the house—the direction from which the sounds had come. At the head of the stairs leading to the library he stumbled over a huddled heap covered by a dressing gown. A few feet farther along the hall was

*A needle pistol is a small, compact weapon, like an ancient automatic. It fires a tiny, needle-shaped pellet, using compressed air as its propelling force.—Author.

There came the faint report of a needle pistol and old Mason Thorn pitched to the floor, dead. On the still night air came the piercing scream of a woman from somewhere in the pent house.



Nariva Saran's room on one side and across from it that occupied by the fastidious Mrs. Glassock and her daughter.

From the position of the body Donovan's police instinct sensed almost intuitively the fact that the needle could have been fired from inside Nariva's room, but not from the Glassock room. Too, it might also have been fired from the doorway of the room occupied by John Saran. But from the direction that the doors of the various rooms opened it could most easily have been fired from Nariva's, had the door been opened not more than an inch, by one standing concealed within. Some of these things came to him as suspicions at the moment, to be verified by investigation later. But above all else there loomed above him

like a hideous spectre the appalling fact that the needle had been fired precisely at *quarter past two*.

Saran was the first on the scene, followed quickly by Percy Thorn and Greeves. Greeves and Saran were fully dressed—a fact which no one but Donovan seemed to note. It was Saran who switched on the lights.

"What has happened?" he cried, his voice oddly loud and forced.

Donovan pointed at the huddled form lying on the floor, the head and face of which were hidden by the large collar of the dressing gown as the body had slumped to the floor. "Murder!" he replied.

Saran looked bewildered; and as Greeves came running up his eyes were wide in astonishment and in-

credulity, but they were not looking at the body on the floor—they were fixed on Macklin Donovan.

Mrs. Glassock now came from her room, and behind her was Genevive, while servants were pouring from the upper floors.

"Who is it?" demanded Percy Thorn.

Donovan stooped and drew back the collar of the dressing gown. A scream broke from the lips of Mrs. Glassock. "My God!" she cried, "it's Mason."

"Father!" exclaimed Percy Thorn, dropping to his knees beside the body. "Who could have done it?" he cried. "Who could have done it?" and he looked around at them all standing there—questioningly, accusingly.

Donovan knelt beside Percy and turned the body over on its back, opened the dressing gown and the shirt and placed his ear above the heart. Presently he arose. They were all looking at him, eyes filled with suspense. Donovan shook his head, sadly.

"Mr. Thorn is dead," he said. "Greeves, go to the phone and call the police. Percy, we shall have to leave the body here until they come. You had better go and prepare your aunt, and prevent her coming down until after the police have been here. I shall remain here. The rest of you may go to your rooms, or not, as you wish. There is nothing that anyone can do until after the police come."

Percy Thorn came to his feet like one in a trance and moved slowly down the hall toward the stairs leading to the third floor where was his aunt's room. Greeves ran quickly down the stairs to the library to the telephone. Donovan looked about him. Where was Nariva Saran.

"Mrs. Glassock," he said, turning to that lady, "will you kindly step to Miss Saran's room and see if she is all right."

Mrs. Glassock crossed the hall and knocked lightly on Miss Saran's door. There was no response. She knocked again, more imperatively. Still no response.

"Try the door," directed Donovan. It was locked. Donovan turned toward Saran. "Where is your daughter?" he demanded. He was no longer the suave young society man. Instead, his voice cut like steel, and in it was the ring of steel.

Saran was pale. "She must be in her room," he replied. "Where else could she be?"

Donovan motioned to a couple of frightened footmen. "Break down the door!" he commanded.

As they stepped forward to obey, the door of Nariva Saran's room opened, revealing her standing there, fully dressed, and breathing rapidly. At sight of Macklin Donovan she voiced a little cry that she tried to smother, and her eyes went very wide.

"What has happened?" she cried, when she found her voice. "I heard a noise—I must have swooned. Who is it?" and she looked down at the still figure on the floor. "Oh, no!" she cried when she recognized the features, "it cannot be—it cannot be Mr. Thorn—it must be a terrible mistake!"

"It was a terrible mistake, Miss Saran," said Dono-

van, coldly, his eyes steadily upon hers.

CHAPTER III

Mystery

THE strato police ship came, and, as Fate would have it, under the command of Lieutenant Terrance Donovan. The body of Mason Thorn was removed to the small room off the library—a room that he had used for a study and in which was a large couch. It was laid upon the couch, near an open window. Then Terrance Donovan returned to the library. Mrs. Glassock was there, and Genevive. Percy Thorn sat on a sofa beside his aunt, who was weeping softly, trying to comfort her. Saran stood before the cold fireplace smoking a cigaret. Greeves remained beside the door to his master's study. There were three burly police officers and some of the maids and housemen also, the latter standing near the hall doorway as though momentarily expecting to be banished.

"Now," said Terrance Donovan, "I want to hear about this. Who saw the shooting?"

"No one," replied his son, "as far as I have been able to discover. The killing occurred at precisely a quarter past two," he glanced at Saran, but the latter was looking at the ceiling. Nariva was not in the room. "I was the first to reach the hall. I found Mr. Thorn lying where you found him, but on his face. It was necessary for me to turn him over to examine him for signs of life—otherwise the body was not disturbed."

Neither Lieutenant Donovan nor Macklin had given any indication of their relationship or that they were even acquainted, owing to the fact that the latter was assuming a role necessary to the successful prosecution of his investigation and that exposure at this time would doubtless nullify all that the Department had accomplished.

"Who do you think might have had reason to wish to kill Mr. Thorn?" continued Lieutenant Donovan.

"I believe that no one could have had any reason for wishing to kill him," replied Macklin. "To my knowledge he hadn't an enemy in the world and I never heard him in altercation with anyone—" He paused. "It is my belief, sir, that the needle that killed Mr. Thorn was intended for another." As he spoke he looked directly at Saran whose eyes were now upon him, and was rewarded by a slight narrowing of the other's lids. Somehow this chance shot had gone home. Saran knew something.

"Who followed you into the hall after the needle was fired?" asked the police official.

"I did," said Saran. "Mr. Donovan was standing over the body of Mr. Thorn as I came from my room. The hall was but dimly lighted, yet sufficiently to permit me to see Mr. Donovan. He was putting something in his hip pocket as I opened the door of my room." The insinuation was obvious and that it was

thoroughly understood was manifest by the sound of quick intaking of breath by several of the occupants of the library.

Macklin smiled. "You'd better have me searched, lieutenant," he said.

"I object to his being searched or questioned farther by this officer," protested Saran.

"Why?" asked Lieutenant Donovan.

"Because you are his father," replied the Assurian.

The effect of this second surprise was almost equal to that of the first. The chin of Mrs. Peabody Glasscock dropped for an instant, then she smiled superciliously.

"The count must have lost his mind," she whispered to her daughter. "The very idea—Macklin Donovan the son of a common policeman!"

Genevive turned to a police officer standing behind them. "What is the lieutenant's name?" she asked.

"Terrance Donovan, mum," replied Officer McGroarty.

Mrs. Glasscock appeared slightly groggy, but she was still in the ring. "Ridiculous!" she exclaimed. "He is of the Donovans of San Francisco." She looked defiantly, and crushingly at Officer McGroarty.

"Sure, mum," said he, "an' it wasn't me that was after sayin' he wasn't—it was him over there," he nodded in the direction of Saran.

Terrance Donovan eyed the Assurian. "What makes you think this man is my son?" he demanded.

Saran hesitated. He seemed to regret that he had made the charge. He smiled deprecatingly and spread his palms before him with a shrug. "One of the servants at Three Gables told my valet. I gave the matter no thought—scarcely believed it, in fact, until you arrived here tonight. Then I recalled."

"How does it happen that you know my name?" asked Terrance Donovan.

SARAN was evidently nonplussed by the question.

He realized his mistake instantly, but it was too late to remedy it. He sought to cover his confusion by a show of anger.

"It makes no difference how I know," he snapped. "I do know, and I don't purpose permitting the murderer of my friend to escape because he is the son of a police lieutenant. I demand that some other officer pursue this investigation."

Terrance Donovan nodded. "You are right," he said. "I think Captain Bushor is here now—I just heard his ship arrive."

"He does not deny that Macklin is his son," whispered Genevive, to her mother.

"Preposterous," said Mrs. Glasscock, but she said it in a small voice—she was weakening. "I always mistrusted him," she added; "he never impressed me as one having the air of one to the manner born, as it were."

At this juncture a large man in the uniform of a captain of police entered the room. He nodded to Lieutenant Donovan and crossed to his side. The

two men whispered together in low tones for a few minutes, then Captain Bushor pointed a large forefinger at John Saran.

"Do you accuse Mr. Macklin Donovan of the murder of Mason Thorn?" he asked.

"I accuse no one," replied Saran; "I merely relate what I witnessed."

"What else did you witness beside what you have told Lieutenant Donovan?"

"After the police came, and while they were carrying Mr. Thorn's body down stairs Mr. Donovan went to his room, took a piece of paper from his pocket and burned it."

Macklin Donovan looked at the speaker in surprise. Saran had spoken the truth, but how had he known?

"Perhaps," continued the Assurian, "he may have hidden his pistol at the same time—provided of course that it was he who shot Mr. Thorn. If the pistol is not in his possession now it may be in his room. He should be searched and so should his room."

"Shure it's a dirty frame," grumbled Officer McGroarty. "I've known Mackie Donovan since we was knee-high to nothin' at all, an' there ain't a sneaky hair in his head." He spoke in a whisper that was audible only to the Glasscocks.

"Then you admit that he is the son of that person there," accused Mrs. Glasscock. "I am not in the least surprised. I have said right along that he had a low face."

Genevive Glasscock looked at her mother in wide-eyed astonishment. "I think he's wonderful," she said, "and I have changed my mind about marrying him." She could not resist the temptation to retaliate for the older woman's past unwelcome efforts at match-making.

"You will return to Philadelphia today," snapped Mrs. Glasscock.

Captain Bushor was searching Macklin for a weapon—which he did not find.

"Now we'll take a look at your room," he said. "You come along," he pointed at Saran. "The rest of you stay here. See that no one leaves the room, McGroarty."

Lieutenant Donovan glanced quickly around the library as he accompanied Bushor, Saran and Macklin toward the stairway. "Where's the butler?" he demanded suddenly.

"Why, he was here just a moment ago," replied Percy Thorn; "perhaps he's stepped into the next room," and he pointed to the study where his father's body lay. "Greeves!" he called, but there was no response.

One of the policemen stepped into the adjoining room. "There ain't no one in there," he said.

"Find him," directed the captain, as he led the way up the stairs, with Macklin Donovan at his side.

UPON the left of the landing half way up the stairs was a tall pier glass. Reflected in it, just for an instant, Macklin saw the shadowy figure of a woman

dart into his room at the far end of the dimly lighted hall. He was upon the point of telling Bushor what he had seen when there flashed to his mind the realization that all the women in the house, save one, were in the library below, and that one was Nariva Saran.

An instant later they reached the head of the stairs in full view of the entire hallway. There had been no opportunity for whoever had entered his room to leave it. The hall had been lighted when last he passed through it after the officers had come, but now the lights were extinguished, the only illumination coming from the landing on the stairway. Who had extinguished them, and why? Possibly what he had just seen reflected in the mirror explained why.

The three men walked directly to Macklin's room, which, like the hall, was in darkness; although Donovan distinctly recalled that the lamp on the reading table had been lighted when he left the room. Just inside the doorway was a switch. Macklin pressed this switch and the room was flooded with light.

"I suggest that you make a very thorough search," said Saran.

"When I want any suggestions from you I'll ask you for 'em," replied Bushor, tersely. Saran subsided, scowling.

"Got a gun, Macklin?" asked the captain.

"It's in my dresser—top drawer on the left," replied young Donovan, indicating the article of furniture with a jerk of his thumb.

Captain Bushor crossed to the dresser and opened the upper left hand drawer, in which he rummaged for a moment. "No gun here, Macklin," he said.

Macklin Donovan knitted his brows. "It was there at the instant that Mr. Thorn was killed," he said. "I had just placed it there."

The police officer continued to ransack the dresser, and then each of the other pieces of furniture in the two rooms and the closet. Nowhere could he find a pistol. Saran was quite evidently restraining a desire to speak, only with the greatest difficulty. At last he could hold his peace no longer. "Why don't you search the bed?" he demanded, eagerly.

Macklin glanced quickly toward the bed, the covers at the foot of which, he noticed for the first time, were disarranged, as though they had been pulled out from the side and hastily tucked in again. Bushor crossed to the bed and pulled the coverings aside. One by one he removed and shook them. Finally he turned the mattress completely off the springs. Saran was almost standing on tip-toe. There was no weapon there!

Young Donovan was looking at Saran, upon whom he kept his eyes as much as possible, and he saw the look of blank surprise that crossed the Assurian's face.

All the time that the search had been going on Donovan had been awaiting the discovery of the person he had seen enter the room only a minute ahead of them. As every nook and cranny was examined without revealing any hidden presence he was reduced to a state

of surprise fully equaling that which Saran had revealed when no pistol had been discovered beneath the mattress. Walking to one of the windows he looked out and examined the roof along the front of the penthouse—there was no one there.

They returned to the library just as the officer who had been detailed to find Greeves entered the room. "I've searched the whole place, Cap'n," he said, "an he ain't here. The penthouse is being watched outside, front an' back, an' there ain't no one gone out."

Bushor nodded. "Then he must be inside," he said. He turned to the company in the room. "You'll all admit that there's something peculiar about this case. I can lock you all up on suspicion, but I don't want to do that. Right now there isn't a case against anybody, and so I'll give you your choice of remaining here under guard until morning, or goin' to the station. Under the circumstances I can't make any exceptions, and I'm stretchin' a point in lettin' you stay here. Which will it be?"

They unanimously chose to remain in the house, under guard. "Now go to your rooms and stay there," He walked from the room, beckoning Lieutenant Donovan to follow him. "I left 'em here," he explained in a low voice, "because I think here is the best place to trap the murderer. He's one of 'em, but I don't know which one. Don't let any one leave the house, and say, find that damned butler. See you about eight o'clock," and he departed.

CHAPTER IV

Ghostly Disappearances

AS the guests started toward their rooms Macklin found himself beside Mrs. Glassock and Genevieve. "It has been a terrible experience for you," he said. "I hope that it has no ill effects. If I can be of any service do not hesitate to call upon me."

Mrs. Glassock's chin arose perceptibly. "The only service you can render us, young man, is to permit us to forget the humiliating position in which your imposture has placed us," and she swept majestically up the stairway.

Genevieve paused beside him. "I am sorry for you, Mr. Donovan," she said, coldly; "but you brought it upon yourself. One should not pretend to be what one is not," and she followed her mother up the stairs to their rooms.

Percy Thorn, assisting his aunt, followed them. As he passed Donovan he stopped and put a hand on the other's shoulder. "I want you to know, Mackie," he said, "that I think Saran is a damned liar."

"Thanks," replied Donovan. "I knew you wouldn't believe such a ridiculous charge."

"But who in the world could have done it?" asked Thorn.

Donovan shook his head. "I wish I *knew*," he replied.

He remained a moment, after the others had gone,

to speak to his father—to ask the latest news concerning his mother, only to learn that there had been no change, then he, too, ascended the stairs toward his room. As he reached the top step the door of Nariva Saran's room opened and he saw her standing there. It was evident that she wanted to speak to him. She held a finger to her lips, enjoining silence, at the same time motioning him toward her. He had taken but a couple of steps in her direction when the door of Saran's room opened and he stepped into the hall. Simultaneously Nariva stepped back into her room and closed her door.

"I thought your room was at the opposite end of the hall, Mr. Donovan," said Saran, with a slightly sarcastic inflection.

"No one should know it better than you," replied Macklin.

Saran paled. "Keep away from my daughter's room," he said, nastily.

Macklin bowed. "She has been absent from the library since the police came," he said, "and I feared that she might be indisposed. I but wished to stop and inquire. Perhaps you can enlighten me."

"My daughter is quite well, thank you," replied Saran, and as Donovan bowed again and turned toward his room the other watched him until he was out of sight.

Again in his room, Donovan threw himself into an easy chair beside the table, and sat pondering the occurrences of the night. That which occupied him most was a mad effort to discover some means of removing all suspicion connected with the attempt that he believed had been made upon his life by Nariva Saran. He did not want to believe it. Yet, try as he would to reach another, the conviction remained unalterable that she had attempted to lure him to his death, and that by chance only Mason Thorn had approached her door at the very instant she had expected Donovan.

It made him wince to even think it, and so he would set off each time upon a new tack in a fruitless effort to explain her various questionable actions upon some other hypothesis. But he could not explain away her evident surprise when she had discovered him alive; he could not explain why she had been the last to come to the hall after the firing of the fatal needle; he could not explain why she and Greeves alone of all the company had been absent from the library during the police investigation. His judgment told him that she and Greeves and Saran were at the bottom of the plot to kill him, yet but just now when she had attempted to speak to him Saran had prevented.

Then there was the memory of those almost tragic words that still were ringing in his ears: "I do love you!" and recollection of the horror that had been in her eyes as she voiced the cry and fled up the stairway. What did it all mean?

Abruptly his eyes glued upon the floor at the bottom of the closet door, beneath which a piece of paper was slowly being pushed into the room.

CAUTIOUSLY Donovan arose from his chair and tip-toed across the room toward the closet. He made no noise as he moved—none until his hand fell upon the knob and then, in the same instant, he flung the door wide. The closet was empty!

He entered it and examined every inch of it. It was absolutely empty except for a couple of suits that he had hung in it the day before. Like all the other closets in the house it was wainscoted with cedar to the same height that the rooms were paneled in various ornamental woods.

Hair crawling on his scalp with eerie pricklings, Donovan came from the closet and locked the door, leaving the key in the lock. Then he stooped and picked up the bit of folded paper. It bore but a single word—the same word that the other message had borne—"BEWARE!"

As he stood before the closet door turning the bit of paper over and over, he searched his mind for an explanation as to the means by which it had been shoved from under the closet door without being in the closet. Suddenly his attention was attracted by what seemed to be a shuffling sound from one of the balconies before the windows on the opposite side of the room.

Cautiously he raised his eyes. The light from the reading lamp illuminated the table, the chair beside it, and a little area of the floor surrounding the two, leaving the balance of the room in a subdued light.

Beyond the table was the window from which the sound seemed to come. As he watched he thought that he saw something move upon the balcony just outside. He remained very quiet, apparently examining the paper in his hand, his eyes barely raised to the window. Again he saw the movement without—a human hand clutching.

There was the hiss of a needle gun. The hand disappeared. The tinkle of metal on stone. A curse. Silence.

Donovan leaped for the window, threw it open and stepped out onto the balcony. There was no one there—there was no one on any of the other balconies. A rich Irish voice rose from below: "Phwat the devil's wrong up there?" it demanded. Its owner was one of the officers left to guard the rear of the house.

"I thought I heard a noise," said Donovan. He said nothing about the figure on his balcony, for he had determined to ferret out the mysteries of that night unaided.

He stooped and examined the stone floor of the balcony. There lay the dagger. He picked it up and carried it into his room. He could hear people running through the hall, aroused and alarmed by this second disturbance. He heard the gruff, low tones of the police, and the high, frightened voices of women. He carried the dagger to the table and held it close to the light. It was a weapon of foreign make, its velvet grip bound with cords of gold. A faint fragrance was wafted to his nostrils. Quickly he

raised the grip closer to them and inhaled, then he let the weapon fall to the table as his hand dropped limply at his side. His face was drawn and white—the hilt was scented with Nariva Saran's perfume.

For a moment he stood thus, then he turned and walked quickly to the door, opened it and stepped into the hall. He wanted to see who was there—or, more particularly, who was not. They were all there—Saran, Nariva, the Glassocks, servants and police. Percy Thorn came down a moment later, his aunt behind him. Greeves alone was absent. No one seemed able to know anything and Donovan kept silent as to what had transpired upon his balcony and within his room.

Tired, haggard, nerve wracked the occupants of the penthouse returned once more to their rooms. Macklin threw himself upon his bed, fully dressed, after switching off the lights. He did not intend to sleep. He wanted to wait until the place quieted, if it ever did, that he might, in comparative safety from discovery, go to Saran's door and listen. He had an idea that Greeves was there and he wanted to make sure. But he was very tired—almost exhausted—and he dozed before he realized the danger. It could have been for but an instant before his sleep was shattered by a piercing scream.

MACKLIN leaped from his bed and ran toward the hall door. As he did so, from the closet door on the opposite side of the room a pistol hissed in the dark and a needle sang by his head. As he had no weapon he could not return the fire, but he sprang to the switch and turned on the lights. Then he wheeled and faced the closet door. It was closed and the key was still upon the outside, where he had left it. He crossed the room and tried the knob—the door was locked!

Entering the hall again he found it filled with nervous men and terrified women. Everyone was talking at once. Only the police were near normal, and even their nerves were a bit on edge.

Lieutenant Terrance Donovan was among them. "Who's missing, Macklin?" he demanded of his son.

"The butler, John Saran and his daughter," replied young Donovan.

"The butler is not on the premises," said his father. "Which is Saran's room?"

"Here," said Macklin, leading the way. The others crowded in their rear.

Lieutenant Donovan opened the door and fumbled for the light switch. His son stepped past him and found it, flooding the room with light. "Look!" he exclaimed, and pointed toward the closet.

There, on the floor, his body in the room, his legs extended into the closet, lay John Saran upon his back, blood running from a needle wound in his forehead. Macklin Donovan turned and ran toward the hall. "Miss Saran!" he cried. "Something may have happened to her."

His father followed him, and again the others

swarmed behind. Macklin knocked upon the girl's door—there was no response. He knocked again—louder. Silence. Motioning the others aside he stepped back, paused, hurled himself against the door with all his weight, striking it with a shoulder. The bolt and keeper tore through the wooden frame and the door swung inward. A single lamp burned upon a table. The room was empty, as were the dressing room and bath and closet.

Macklin called the girl's name aloud: "Nariva! Nariva!" but there was no response. He looked blankly at his father. "What do you make of it, Dad?" he asked.

The older man shook his head. "It's got me," he admitted; "but we'll find her—she must be in the house."

"That's what you said about Greeves," his son reminded him; "but you haven't found him yet."

"I'll search the house myself this time," replied Terrance Donovan. "I want to have a closer look at Saran's room and the body, then we'll lock it up, and I'll go through the place."

Together they went into the hall and approached Saran's door. It was closed—they had left it open. The elder Donovan tried the knob, then he stooped and looked through the key hole.

"The door is locked, Mackie," he said. "Locked on the inside," he turned to one of his men. "Break it in McGroarty," he said.

The huge Irishman had to do little more than lean against the door to send it crashing into the room. The lieutenant smiled. "There is nothing heavier than a ton of Irish," he said, and McGroarty grinned, but the smile and the grin both faded as the two officers stepped into the room, for Saran's body was not there—only a little pool of blood marked the spot upon the floor outside the open closet door where the dead man's head had rested.

Terrance Donovan scratched his head, then he turned and looked accusingly at the company clustered in the doorway. A wide eyed, terrified house maid was sobbing, hysterically. "Shut up!" admonished Donovan, whose own nerves were on edge by the various happenings in this penthouse of mystery.

"I c-can't," sobbed the girl. "If ever I lives through this night, I quits. The house is haunted. I've said so right along. The noises I've heard—my gord!"

"What noises have you heard?" demanded Lieutenant Donovan.

"Footsteps at night w'en I'd be a-comin' home late. I'd run all the ways up stairs as fast as I could go, 'til I got scairt to go out o'nights."

"Footsteps where?" asked the officer.

"In those rooms when there wasn't nobody in 'em—on this floor mostly. This floor's the worst."

"Didn't you ever tell anyone about 'em?" pursued Donovan.

"Sure! Didn't I tell Mr. Greeves half a dozen times?"

"What did he say?"

"He said I was just a nervous little girl afraid of the dark—that it was all my imagination. Imagination! I suppose poor Mr. Thorn a-lyin' down stairs there dead, is imagination. An' this here dead man wot gets up an' locks his door an' vanishes—I suppose he's imagination, too. My gord!"

Donovan turned to the others. "If you would feel safer together," he said, "you may go to the library and remain there the balance of the night—it will not be long now until daylight. There are officers all around the penthouse—you will be perfectly safe there."

"I wouldn't go back to my room alone if you'd star me in the Television Follies," said the house maid. The others appeared to feel similarly, for they moved toward the stairway and down to the library in a huddled group. There were no stragglers.

CHAPTER V

The Vanishing Mr. Greeves

LIEUTENANT DONOVAN, with Macklin and McGroarty, searched the penthouse from top to bottom—there was not a room, or closet, or cupboard that they did not investigate—but their search revealed no trace of Miss Saran, the butler, or the body of John Saran. They had vanished as utterly as though they had never existed.

"It's got me," said Lieutenant Donovan.

Macklin shook his head. "There's some explanation," he said.

"Of course there is."

"And I intend to find it. Good night, Dad, I'm going to my room again."

The older man reached into a pocket and produced a needle gun. "Take this, Mackie," he said, "you may be needin' it. I found it in the library table. And I'm goin' to send a couple of the boys up to sit with you."

"What for?" demanded the young man.

"I can't be tellin' you, Mackie—you wouldn't understand; but I've got my own reasons, and they're good ones. I been puttin' two and two together this night—an' they don't make eight either."

"I can take care of myself, Dad."

"Sure you can. That's probably what Thorn and Saran thought, too. Now look at 'em."

Macklin shrugged. "All right," he said; "but remember that I'm working on a case and tell them not to interfere with me."

"They'll be under your orders, me boy."

Shortly after Macklin Donovan entered his room the two police officers knocked at the door.

"Make yourselves at home, boys," he said as the two entered, and going to the table he brought cigars for them. "I don't want to talk," he said, after they had seated themselves and lighted their cigars, "I want to listen." They nodded.

Both the officers were sleepy and in a few minutes were half dozing. Macklin was listening and thinking. He was trying to figure some explanation that would account for the mysterious disappearance of two living inmates of the penthouse and a dead man. He attempted also to fathom to the causes underlying his father's recent apprehension concerning his own safety. If Terrance Donovan had known all that had occurred in the house and especially in Macklin's room there would be ample grounds for his fear; but he did not. He must know something else, then. What was it?

Both the officers were dozing and Macklin was deep in thought when he was startled by a sibilant "S-s-st!" from somewhere at his right. He wheeled around, facing the two officers. Neither one of them had moved, and their deep, regular breathing attested the fact that both were asleep. In the middle of the floor, between Donovan and one of the officers, lay a bit of paper folded into a small cylinder about which was a rubber band.

Donovan rose and stepped quickly to the window. There was no one on any of the balconies. Then he turned to the closet door which he found still locked and the key on the outside where he had left it. He moved on tip toe to avoid arousing the officers, and thus he investigated both his room and the bath. Finally he returned to the room where the policemen still slept and picked the piece of paper from the floor. As he unfolded it he expected to find the usual message—Beware; but this was something different.

"Be quick! Get out of this room. Your life is in danger," it read, in the same crude printing that had marked the others.

One of the officers awoke just as Macklin was stuffing the paper into his pocket.

"Anything wrong?" asked the policeman. "I thought someone was walkin' round the room, or was I sleepin'?"

"You were sleeping all right," said Donovan, "and you can go back to sleep if you want—I'll watch."

"What's that?" whispered the officer, cocking an ear.

"Sounds like someone in Saran's room," replied Macklin in a low tone, at the same time moving cautiously toward the door.

The sound they had heard was a subdued crackling noise. Against the silence of the night, and coming as it did from the vacant room in which Saran had been murdered, it induced an impression of uncanniness that made both men shiver, innured though they were to dangers and to mysteries. Behind Donovan came the policeman and as the former laid his hand upon the knob of the door the other officer awakened.

Observing their silence and their stealthy movements at a glance he arose and followed them with equal quiet. Together the three crept out into the hallway and moved noiselessly toward Saran's door, which stood open as it had since McGroarty had

broken it in. Macklin was in the lead. He had reached the frame of the door and was on the point of looking into the interior of the room when a figure stepped from it into the hall. Instantly Macklin seized it—it was Greeves.

THE butler was evidently surprised, but he remained cool. "Beg pardon, sir," he said, "I did not see you."

"No," said Donovan, sarcastically; "but I saw you. I've been lookin' for you, Greeves."

"Oh, have you, sir?" exclaimed the butler, in his best official tones. "I am very sorry, sir. I have been in my room."

"You're a damned liar, Greeves," exclaimed Donovan.

"Yes, sir!" replied the butler. "I was just looking for you, sir. You must not return to that room," and he pointed along the hall toward Macklin's door.

"Why?" demanded Donovan.

"It is not safe, sir."

"Why is it not safe?"

"I cannot tell you, sir; but please believe me, it is not safe," and then he turned to the officers. "Do not allow him to return to that room, I beg of you," he insisted. "Even if you remain with him he will be a dead man within five minutes after he crosses the threshold."

Macklin Donovan stood eyeing the butler closely. The man was evidently very much in earnest, but what motives prompted the warning? Donovan had his own opinion—the gang wanted to keep him out of that room for some particular reason and they were trying to frighten him out, first by the note and now by means of Greeves. Well, he wouldn't be frightened. He saw that the butler was out of breath and that his clothing was soiled here and there with dust and cobwebs.

"Where have you been all night?" he demanded suddenly.

"Attending to my duties," responded the butler.

"Once more, you are a liar."

"Yes, sir!"

"Where is Miss Saran?"

"Is she not in her room, sir?"

"Where is she? Answer me!"

"You will pardon me, Mr. Donovan; but I have some other duties to attend to. I must be going," and he moved toward the stairs leading to the upper floors.

"No you don't!" cried Donovan, and grabbed for the man.

Greeves dodged him and started to run.

"Grab him!" cried Macklin to the officer who was nearest the butler.

The big Irishman jumped in front of the fugitive and held out both ponderous hands to seize him. It was a foolish move, for it left his chin exposed; but then who would expect a middle-aged butler to be so rough? Greeves struck the policeman once without even pausing and as the latter slumped to the floor the butler leaped across his body to the stairway.

Just as he turned into it Macklin drew his gun and fired, at the same time leaping in pursuit with the second policeman at his heels. Macklin fired again as he reached the foot of the stairs and saw Greeves disappearing at the turn half way up. Donovan was young and active. He went up those stairs three or four at a time, but when he reached the top Greeves was nowhere to be seen.

Followed by the officer, Donovan ascended at a run to the fourth floor—no Greeves. He searched every apartment there and even found the scuttle that led to the roof, but that was fastened upon the inside, precluding the possibility that Greeves had escaped in this way, even had he had time to do so in the short interval of his lead over Donovan.

CRESTFALLEN, the two men returned to the third floor and searched it thoroughly. They were joined there by Terrance Donovan and McGroarty who had been attracted by Macklin's shooting. Young Donovan narrated the incidents of the last few minutes to his father. "He just vanished—that was all—vanished," he concluded.

Donovan senior scratched his head. "As I've said about forty times this night, Mackie, it's got me, and I've been twenty-two years on the New York police force an' seen some funny things. If I hadn't pounded on walls tonight until I've near wore all the hide off me knuckles I'd say the place was full o' phoney panels, but it ain't—every wall's as solid as every other one—there ain't no air spaces nowhere. And then, too, boy, I've even paced off the length and breadth of the penthouse and the rooms and the closets, and there's no space unaccounted for. And there's no way into the tower below. Yes, sir—it's got me."

"It's getting me, too," said his son; "but I'm goin' to stick with it."

"You keep out of that room, though," said his father. "Better come down to the library with the others."

Macklin shook his head. "I'll go in the room across the hall from mine—that's not being used," he said.

"There ain't any of 'em being used except the library," remarked the lieutenant with a smile; "you can take your choice of a lot of rooms—but I wouldn't care for Saran's, myself."

"Nor I," said Macklin, "there's something funny about that room."

Together they descended to the second floor. "On your way down turn the light on the landing out, Dad," said Macklin; "I want to listen up here in the dark for a while."

"Keep to your room," cautioned his father.

"If it's dark they can't see me to harm me and I can listen from my doorway without being seen," explained Macklin.

"All right," agreed his father and walked down the hallway toward the stairs leading to the library while Macklin and the two officers turned toward the room opposite that which young Donovan had occupied.

Macklin turned off the remaining hall lights leaving the second floor in utter darkness, then he entered the room with the policemen, switched on the lights there long enough for them to find chairs and then switched them off again. Before their eyes could become accustomed to the darkness he recrossed the room to the door and stepped out into the hall, making no noise. In equal silence he crossed to the door of the room he had formerly occupied.

Stealthily he turned the knob and opened the door. The darkness within was solid except for the two rectangular spaces that were the windows—areas that were but faintly visible against the deeper darkness of the room. As he stood just inside the door listening, he thought that he discerned something moving on one of the balconies—just a vague suggestion of a figure without definite form or shape. It riveted his attention and held his eyes. Very softly he reached behind him and closed the door, fearing that one of the officers in the room across the hall, missing him, might switch on a light that would be sure to reveal him standing there in the doorway.

Drawing his pistol he moved slowly forward toward the window—inch by inch he moved, fearing that the slightest noise might frighten away whatever haunted his balcony. He had crossed to about the middle of the room, when, without warning, the narrow beams of a flashlight burst from the closet full upon the window toward which he had been creeping. Macklin Donovan came up standing with a gasp as his eyes rested upon what the beams of the flashlight revealed beyond the window—a face pressed close against the pane—the face of Saran, the dead man, with the blood upon its forehead.

Almost instantly the face vanished toward the left and then the flashlight swung slowly about the room, coming closer and closer to Macklin Donovan. His first impulse was to flee—there was something so uncanny about the silence and the seeming inevitableness of that grisly light searching him out in the darkness of the chamber of mystery. Then he sought to keep ahead of it, but at last it drove him into a corner where he halted and held his pistol ready. An instant later the light touched his face and stopped upon it, blinding him. Then it was that he raised his weapon and fired point-blank into its fiery eye. Instantly the light disappeared.

A moment of silence was followed by a weird crackling sound, coming, apparently, from the interior of the closet—then silence again. Donovan sprang through the darkness for the closet door. Fumbling for the knob, he found it; but the door was locked, and the key, which had been on the outside, was gone.

CHAPTER VI

The Mystery of the Closet

SLIGHTLY bewildered by the rapidity with which the events of the past few moments had followed

one another, and dazed by the inexplicable mystery of the weird light that had blazed through the panels of a locked door, Donovan hesitated briefly as he sought to adjust his reasoning faculties to the improbabilities of the facts that confronted them, and select a plan of action.

Long since had the call of duty merged with an over-mastering urge to discover the fate or the whereabouts of Nariva Saran, and to determine definitely her connection with the plotters, that he might fix her responsibility in the matter of the murder of Mason Thorn and the attempts upon his own life. Just how far she was involved with Greeves and Saran he could not know, and now the shooting of Saran had helped to upset whatever theories he had commenced to entertain relative to the connection existing between the three.

If Greeves and Saran had been in league with one another, and there was no doubt in Donovan's mind but that they had been, it seemed unlikely that Greeves should have shot Saran, while the conclusion that Nariva had been guilty of the murder of her father was impossible of entertainment.

Who, then, had shot Saran? Was Saran dead? The fact that he had seen and recognized his face at the window but a moment since, would have, under ordinary circumstances, settled that question definitely; but the circumstances of the past few hours had been anything but ordinary.

Where was Nariva? If Saran were not dead, it was reasonable to assume that if he could find him, he could find Nariva, also, since the most natural conjecture would place father and daughter near one another. But where to search for them! They had not left the Thorn Building, yet they were not in the Thorn penthouse. Already had the place been searched until there remained no unrevealed hiding place where even a cat might have concealed itself successfully from the searchers. There remained but a single tenable conclusion—all others were preposterous, unthinkable, verging upon the demoniacal.

Sane judgment assured him that Saran was not dead—that the face he had seen at the window must have been the face of a living man, and that that man was John Saran. The thing to do, then, was to follow.

He walked quickly across the room, raised the window, and stepped out upon the balcony. The apparition, or the man, whichever it had been, had disappeared to the left, so toward the left Donovan looked. Three feet away was the balcony before the windows of the dressing room and bath, beyond that, at similar intervals, the balconies of the adjoining rooms. Below was the small garden between the rear of the penthouse and the landing deck of the skyscraper, whereon rested two ships—the police ship and the Thorn ship. Nowhere, upon the balconies nor in the garden, was anyone in sight, though he knew that directly beyond were the policemen guarding the building's roof.

Stealthily, that he might not attract the attention of the officers, Donovan climbed over the hand-rail

and stepped to the next balcony. There he paused for a moment, listening. He heard nothing other than the subdued night noises of the city from far below. A mile away loomed the twin tower, a giant searchlight sweeping the sky in ceaseless grandeur.

Cautiously he made his way to the nearest balcony. The window letting upon it was wide open. Within was darkness and silence. He threw a leg over the sill and drew himself into the interior, silently. His feet dropped softly to the floor and he stood erect. Eerily he sensed the room was not unoccupied. Of that he had startling proof immediately. From out of the darkness at his left came a low-toned whisper.

"Go back!" it warned. "In the name of heaven, go back before they kill you!"

For just a moment Donovan hesitated, then he turned and moved quickly across the room in the direction from which the voice had come. He walked with his left hand extended before him, in his right his needle gun.

"Who are you," he demanded, "and who will kill me?"

"S-s-st!" warned the voice. "They will hear you."

Before him a closet door opened, and he gazed blankly into its empty interior. It was lit with a dim radiance, seeming to glow from the very walls. Advancing cautiously, he entered, his weapon ready. The voice was no longer in evidence.

"Who is here?" demanded Donovan, his hair crawling on his scalp. "Where are you?"

There was no answer.

Donovan rapped with his knuckles sharply at the walls, but they were solid all around. His knocks gave forth no hollow sounds, only muffled solidity of tone. Several coat hangers caught his eye. In the odd glow that still permeated the place, like a sort of after-vision, one of them seemed to shine with a light all its own. He reached up, touched it. It seemed loose. He grasped it and pulled.

Instantly he let go. All about him a weird blue light shone, and a strange crackling noise came. A second, then it was gone, and he was plunged into utter darkness. Behind him the closet door was closed, and he backed hastily against it before he realized the fact. Bewildered he whirled, ready for a trap, and his hand shot to the knob.

The door was not locked. It opened under his thrust.

Simultaneously a door at the far end of the room opened, revealing the figure of a large man silhouetted against the doorway of a lighted room across a hall. Across the hall, a room that was *not* in the Thorn penthouse. A *strange* room!

"Is that you, Danard?" demanded the man in the doorway.

Beyond him Donovan caught a glimpse of several men and a woman, seated or standing about a table. At the gruff question of the man in the doorway, those who were facing him looked up, while the woman,

whose back had been toward the door, turned around. Macklin Donovan caught but a fleeting glimpse of her face, as at the very instant that she turned a hand reached out of the darkness and powerful fingers seized his arm. He was jerked violently backward. His pistol was wrenched from his grasp and he heard the loud voice of the man in the doorway crying: "Answer me, damn you, or I fire!"

Then a door closed behind him and there came to his ears, faintly, the muffled sigh of a needle pistol. He tried to grapple with the man who was dragging him along, half backward, through the darkness, but the man was very powerful and the whole incident lasted but a moment before he felt himself swung violently around and pushed heavily forward into the dark, where he stumbled and then sprawled headlong to the floor.

As he fell two thoughts animated his mind—one was that he must lie very quiet for the purpose of deceiving his assailant into the belief that he was stunned, that he might thus take advantage of the other and overpower him—the other was the realization that the woman he had seen in that weird lighted room that seemed to exist in some other space was Nariva Saran.

It seemed to him that he had scarcely fallen before he heard footsteps in front of him, running toward him. He heard a door fly open, and with the click of an electric switch the outer room was flooded with light. He leaped to his feet then to grapple with his assailants and as he faced them he uttered an oath of astonishment and stepped back in utter incredulity. They were the two police officers whom he had left but a few minutes before. He was in the closet of the room from the window of which he had stepped a minute or two since. And behind him where had been a door through which he had just been thrust was a blank wall! The policemen looked at him.

"What happened?" asked one. "We thought we heard a scrap goin' on in here."

"No," replied Donovan, his mind whirling. "I was just looking for something in the dark and stumbled into this closet."

Donovan moved toward the hallway. Through the pall of mystery a light was breaking. What it would reveal he could scarce even guess, yet that it would illuminate several hitherto seemingly inexplicable occurrences seemed probable, and it might lead to complete revelations. It might also lead to deeper mystery, and there was even a greater chance that it might lead to death; but that was a chance that every man in the service expected to be called upon to face in the pursuance of duty.

In only one respect did the plan forming in his mind disregard the straight path of duty, and that lay in his determination to carry it through alone, notwithstanding the fact that he might enlist the co-operation of an ample force of police to assist him. The passion he felt for Nariva Saran prompted him to formulate his plan in secrecy and carry it out alone.

Whatever she might be, however guilty of attempts upon his life, love demanded that he give her every chance, and that he could not accomplish if he shared his suspicions with the police, even though one of them were his father, for the best of policemen appear to assume all those under suspicion as guilty until proven innocent.

If he led them, as he believed he could, to her hiding place, they would arrest her with the others, and all would be thrown into jail. He must, if possible, first discover the degree of her guilt. If he found her guilty, he assured himself sternly, no consideration of love would deter him from carrying on along the straight path of duty.

As he moved toward the doorway one of the officers pointed at the floor behind him.

"There's your gun," he said. "It must have dropped out of your pocket when you did the Brodie."

"Yes," agreed Donovan, as he turned and recovered the weapon, still further mystified by the fact of its return to him.

In the hallway he met his father coming from the third floor, and called him aside. "I think I'm next to something," he whispered in a low tone. "Don't ask me any questions. I'll tell you what I want and then you tell me if you'll do it."

"Shoot," said Lieutenant Donovan.

"I want every light above the first floor shut off and a stall made that will kid anyone who may be listening into believing that all of you have gone downstairs. But instead post three or four men in this hall, in the dark, and have one close to each of the doors on this side—mine, Saran's and his daughter's, with orders to nab anyone who comes out unless they give a countersign that we'll agree upon."

"How can anyone come out when there ain't nobody in any of these rooms?" demanded Terrance Donovan.

"I don't know," replied his son. "That's what I want to find out. The countersign can be *Three Gables*. Whisper it and all your instructions to your men—if walls ever had ears it's these walls."

"What are you goin' to do?" asked the father.

"Never mind—I told you not to ask me any questions."

The older man shook his head. "Mackie," he said, "there's something about all this night's business that I've got a hunch is hooked up with something I can't tell you about, yet. If I'm right it's all got more to do with you than it has with Mason Thorn. I wish you'd get out of this house an' go home. I'll send a couple of the boys with you."

Young Donovan laughed. "I supposed you'd laugh," said his father, "but I wish you'd do it, Mackie. I don't think your life's safe here."

The younger man placed a hand affectionately on his father's shoulder. "Don't worry, Dad," he said, "I can take care of myself, and even if I can't, you don't want a son of yours running away from his post, do you?"

Lieutenant Terrance Donovan turned slowly away. "The lights'll be out an' the men posted in two minutes," he whispered, "an' God be with you!"

In less than the brief time he had stipulated the upper floors of the penthouse were in darkness and Lieutenant Donovan with several of his men were descending to the first floor with considerable show of noise, so that any listener might think a greater number were descending than actually were. Behind him he left three burly policemen silently guarding three doorways in the blackness of the second-floor hallway. What had become of Macklin Donovan, he did not know.

CHAPTER VII

Across Space

DONOVAN stood still until after the lights had been extinguished, then he crept noiselessly through the darkness toward the room where he knew lay the road to that strange place of a world within a world, of rooms where no rooms were in this solid real world of which he now was a part. He reached it and entered softly, his gun ready. The closet door he found closed, and his heart throbbed as he laid a hand on the knob.

It was like placing a hand on the knob of a door that led to infinity. Beyond was a space no more than four feet square, and yet, it opened into an unseen universe. But where?

Nariva Saran was there, and where she was, he wanted to be, to prove to himself at least, her innocence or her duplicity. Whatever it was, he must know the truth.

Abruptly he turned the knob and opened the door. The interior of the closet was black as ink. No dim bluish radiance now, of a weird encroaching world. No ghostly radiation from nowhere. An eerie sense of appalling danger gripped him as he nerved himself to step over the threshold. Was anyone lurking there, ready to kill? But he reasoned it was just as dark to anyone else, and if they were there, he had an equal chance.

He stepped forward, waved a hand about—four walls, all blank! The closet was empty. He released the pent-up breath in his lungs and closed the closet door behind him. Then his searching fingers sought the hangers on the wall. He found one, rested his fingers lightly upon it, his body suddenly chill. There, beneath his hand, lay the unknown. Some weird science should spring out as he pulled it down.

Stiffening, he pulled suddenly. Nothing happened. The hanger did not move. No dummy, this, but the real thing. He felt for another, found it, and once more pulled it down. It gave, and abruptly the weird blue light sprang forth. A second of time he had to observe it, hear its uncanny crackling sound, then it winked out. As simple, as quick as that!

Eager now, for action, he turned to the door. But

he halted abruptly as he heard muffled voices from beyond. They seemed far away, as though more than one door intervened. Cautiously he turned the knob and opened the door a fraction of an inch. The voices came louder now, raised in altercation. But the room beyond was dark and empty.

Opening the door wide, Donovan advanced across the room, conscious of its strangeness. Beneath his feet was no carpet, as had been the case beyond the closet of the room he *should* have been in. It was a bare floor, uncarpeted, of stone.

He found a door, ajar, leading into a hallway, and slipped through it. Here was light, dim, coming from outside through several windows and a partly transparent glass wall. Passing a window he gazed out in all-consuming curiosity. Would a glimpse of the familiar roof-top of the Thorn building, the gardens beneath the tiny balconies, give him a clue as to the location of these rooms and halls?"

But at the sight that met his eyes, he gasped aloud. There *was* a roof-top, but a *strange* one. And beyond its rails was New York, as he had always seen it, with its giant skyscrapers. A mile away loomed a giant one—and his heart failed within him as he recognized it. *It was the Thorn Building!* "Great God!" he whispered.

He, Macklin Donovan, had been transmitted in an instant of time, across a mile of space, to the twin tower he had looked upon so many times already this night! Incredible, fantastic occurrence! What weird science was back of it all? What great thing had he stumbled upon? No petty attempt on a millionaire's money, this, but something colossal, something far ahead of the science of even that great city out there.

The beat of angry voices broke through his amazement now, and he realized with a start what his mission was. Here, in this giant building of mystery was Nariva Saran. And somehow, he knew now, she was a helpless tool, in the grip of strange sciences.

He came to a door. Beyond it were the voices. He listened.

A MAN was speaking—the voice was coarse and uncultured. He spoke in the Assyrian tongue. Young Donovan understood it well, and he was glad now that his father had insisted upon his learning it. He had never understood why so much stress had been laid upon languages in his education—he did not understand now. He merely was glad that he had learned Assyrian as well as French, Spanish and German.

"There is a traitor among us," the man was saying. "Or Thorn divulged the secrets of the penthouse to others," suggested a second voice; "*that*, you know, is very possible and would explain much." At the sound of the second voice Donovan raised his eyebrows, for he recognized the tones—they belonged to Greeves.

There was some grumbling, as though of dissent from the suggestion, and then the first voice spoke

again. "This girl—how long have you known her, Saran? There is something about her that reminds me of someone else. Are you very sure of her?"

"You ought to be sure of me—I have been working with you for more than a year," said a feminine voice. It was Nariva!

"The Committee recommended her," came a man's voice—Saran's. "Beyond that I know nothing of her. Until tonight I have had no reason to mistrust her; but now! By God, someone is double-crossing us—someone tried to kill me. She is the only one who could have had a motive."

"What motive?" demanded the gruff voice of the first speaker.

"The fool is in love with *him*."

There was a long silence and then, suddenly, an exclamation from him of the coarse voice. There was the scraping of a chair and other sounds indicative of a seated man rising excitedly to his feet. Donovan knelt and placed an eye close to the key-hole, revealing, in the thus circumscribed range of his vision, three of the occupants of the room.

Seated at a table, her back partially toward him, Nariva Saran was nearest the door beyond which he knelt; upon the opposite side of the table from her he could see two men. One of them was Saran, who, seated, was looking up at the man at his right—the one whom Donovan had heard rise from his chair. The latter, a coarse, heavy man, leaned forward across the table and shook a trembling finger in the face of Nariva Saran. He appeared inarticulate with rage.

Donovan could not see Greeves, nor the other occupants of the room, if there were others, except a man's hand and part of a coat sleeve resting on the table to the right of the bearded figure. There might be a dozen men in the room, for aught that Macklin Donovan knew to the contrary, and he sincerely hoped that, however many constituted the gang, they were all in that room—it would have been most embarrassing to have had one of them come up behind him at that moment.

He wondered what it was all about—the obviously overmastering excitement and anger of the man facing Nariva Saran—the trembling, accusing finger—the tense silence of the others in the room. Presently the bearded one found his voice.

"Spy!" he screamed. "I know you now."

He turned excitedly to the right and left toward the others in the room. "You are fools!" he cried. "We are all fools, dupes. The scientists have tricked us nicely. Do you not know who she is?" His voice rose almost to a shriek, as he turned upon the girl again. He leaned so far forward that his pudgy finger almost touched her face as he pointed it at her.

"You are Sanders' daughter!" he cried, accusingly.

"Think of it," he exhorted the others, "the daughter of Michael Sanders, the acknowledged war leader of the scientists, admitted for more than a year to our inner circle." He turned upon the girl again:

"You deny it?" he demanded.

"Have I denied it?" she asked. Her voice was level, her mien dignified; but Donovan could see that her cheek was pale.

"You know the fate of spies?" the man continued.

The girl nodded. The man faced Saran. "The responsibility for this is more yours than another's," he said. "Is it possible that there are two spies among us?"

"There may be two, Danard; but I am not one of them," replied Saran, whose facial muscles were working in nervous anger. "She tricked me, as she did all of you; but she did not try to kill any of you. She tried to kill me, the—" he applied a foul name to her. "For the safety of the cause, she must die. Let me, then, be her executioner."

Danard held up a restraining hand. "Let this thing be carried out in order," he said. "Have you anything to say, Spy?"

"What could I say to you, Danard, betrayer of the Science Ruler's trust, murderer, exploiter of your fellow country-men, traitor, that would influence you from the decision that you reached the instant that you recognized me. I am ready tonight, as I have always been, to die for Assuria and the science empire."

"Then die!" cried Danard, flushing angrily, and nodded to Saran.

THE latter rose and as he did so he drew a pistol from his pocket. The girl rose, too, and stood facing them haughtily, her head high. At the same instant Macklin Donovan pushed the door aside and stepped into the room just as Saran raised his weapon. The secret-service-man fired first. Saran grasped at his breast, slumped forward upon the table, and then slipped to the floor.

The other occupants of the room turned surprised eyes upon the intruder—there were five men and the girl.

Danard uttered an exclamation of surprise as his eyes fell upon Donovan.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, exultantly, "it is *he*!"

"Who?" demanded another—"not—?"

"Yes," cried Danard—"Alexander!" and then: "For Assuria! For the New Freedom!" he screamed and leveled his needle pistol.

Donovan raised his own weapon and pulled the trigger—with no result, for the empty shell had jammed after he had shot Saran. Simultaneously Greeves drew a gun and fired, dropping Danard in his tracks. Nariva leaped past Macklin to the switch beside the door and plunged the room into darkness. Someone grasped him by an arm on one side and an instant later he was seized by a second person upon the other.

Danard was groaning.

A voice cried: "Stop them! Kill them!"

There was the sound of heavy shoes on stone floor, and furniture pushed about and overturned. Nariva's

voice sounded in Donovan's ear.

"Come quickly!" she urged in a whisper. "You can trust me—you *must* trust me!" He felt himself rushed along through the darkness, turning first this way and then that.

Suddenly he felt hands seize for him from out of the darkness before him as he collided with an invisible form.

"Halt!" commanded a deep voice, and then. "I got 'em; give a hand here." Heavy footsteps sounded, running. An instant of flickering, crackling blue, then more darkness. Then someone switched on lights and the astonished Donovan found himself in the second floor hallway of the Thorn penthouse, a burly policeman grappling with him, while two more came running to the assistance of the first. On one side of him was Nariva Saran and on the other, Greeves.

The officer who held him looked hurt. "Why didn't ye give the counter-sign?" he demanded.

Terrance Donovan, leaping up the stairs from the library three at a time, came down the hall at a run. "Hang on to those two," he ordered, indicating Greeves and the girl. "Good boy, Mackie, you got 'em! That's the boy!"

"I didn't get them, though," replied young Donovan, ruefully; "they got me."

Greeves was smiling. "You needn't worry about us, now, Lieutenant Donovan," he said. "We won't elude you again—these's no more need for it."

"I'll say you won't!" exclaimed Terrance Donovan; "not if I know myself, you won't. I've got you, now, and I'm goin' to keep you."

"There's something about this, Dad, that we don't understand," said Macklin. "Greeves and Miss Saran just saved my life. But before we go into it any farther we've got to get the rest of the gang." He turned to Greeves. "Will you show Lieutenant Donovan and his men how you get back and forth between these two buildings so easily and so quickly?"

"Certainly, sir," said Greeves, "but I doubt if you find your men now. We got the ones you counted. The other three do not count for much—they were only tools working for hire, and, as far as I know, they have committed no crimes."

"Who in hell are you, anyway?" demanded Macklin Donovan of the butler.

"Wait until we come back and I will tell you everything," replied Greeves.

"Go ahead, then," commanded Lieutenant Donovan, "but I'll keep a good hold on you—you may be all right but you're too damned slippery to suit me."

Greeves laughed. "All right, Lieutenant, I don't know that I can blame you," he replied.

"Mac, you stay here and see that this woman don't get away again," Terrance Donovan instructed McGroarty, "the rest of you come along with us."

Greeves led them into the room formerly occupied by Macklin. The closet door now stood open, as the lights revealed after Greeves had switched them on. Crowding them all into the closet the butler closed the

door and took hold of a hanger at the end of the closet and pulled on it—the blue radiance flared. Although nothing seemed changed Greeves opened the door, leading them into a chamber corresponding with the one they had left, except that it was unlit. He switched on the lights, revealing an unfurnished room.

"My God!" rapped Lieutenant Donovan, leaping forward and staring out of the window. "Where are we and how did we get here?"

"You are in the penthouse of the tall building a mile from the Thorn building," Greeves explained. "And you have just been transmitted by means of radio waves from a closet in the Thorn building to this room.* The apparatus is built into the walls. Assurian science has gone far in twenty years."

Lieutenant Donovan startled, glanced at his son. "Yes," he said slowly. "It has!"

The police crossed the hall, entered the room and switched on the lights. Saran's dead body lay upon the floor, where it had fallen. With the exception of a few pieces of furniture, some of which was overturned, the room was vacant and unoccupied. Greeves appeared puzzled. He turned to Macklin Donovan.

"I thought Danard was mortally wounded," he said. "I expected to find him dead."

Donovan nodded. "The others must have helped him to get away; but they can't be far. You'd better search, Dad."

"You'll find a trap door leading to the building proper," Greeves told them, "but it will be useless to follow. They've gotten away by this time. It's too bad we lost Danard—he's the man you want."

"Why?" demanded Lieutenant Donovan.

"It was Danard who murdered Mr. Thorn."

CHAPTER VIII

A Prince of Science

AS Macklin Donovan entered the Thorn library a few moments later with Greeves, Nariva Saran and his father, he spoke pleasantly to the Glassocks and the Thorns. Percy Thorn returned his greeting cordially, Miss Euphonia, crushed and weeping, was too buried in her own grief to notice anyone. Genevieve Glassock nodded indifferently and looked in another direction, while Mrs. Peabody Glassock, looking directly through him, failed apparently to perceive either him or his salutation; unless a slightly increased elevation of her patrician chin denoted aught to the contrary.

*Radio transmission of matter is by no means impossible. Theoretically, the principle is the same as that used in transmission of pictures by radio waves. Although this is a slow process, wherein the picture is broken up into a series of lines, packed close together, by a scanner which differentiates between light and dark portions in sending a varying radio signal, there is no reason why a radio beam of diffused nature embodying an instant electrical pickup of the electrons of an object, might not transform matter into energy, transmit it in an unalterable form through space with the speed of light, and once more transform energy into the original matter. Since the pattern remains the same, the body would be received just as sent.—Ed.

"It is strange," she whispered later to her daughter, "that the Thorn's should have tolerated such people; but then poor Mason could not have known. It is Percy's fault—he must have gotten it from his mother; her grandfather, you know, had nothing—absolutely nothing. Ah, blood will tell—*always!* One can see it in that Donovan person—common, very common."

She was interrupted by Lieutenant Donovan's gruff voice. "Now, Greeves," he was saying, "if you've got anything to say I want to tell you first that it may be used against you."

"I understand," replied the butler. "In the first place, Lieutenant Donovan, it may help you to understand matters better from the first if I tell you that this young lady," he indicated Nariva Saran, with a respectful inclination of the head, "is not the daughter of Saran. She is the daughter of Michael Sanders, twenty-two years ago War Minister of Assuria, whom, doubtless, you well recall."

Terrance Donovan's face betrayed the astonishment the statement induced.

"As you know, the Alexander of Assuria was brought to America in infancy to preserve him from the wrath of the revolutionists, who assassinated the balance of the science family the day following his removal from the palace. Only Sanders and the Science Ruler's valet, Paul Danard, beside yourself and your wife, held the secret of the whereabouts of the boy."

"Danard joined the revolutionists, but he kept his secret until recently, using his knowledge to extort money from Sanders, the head of the scientist's party. For the past three years he has been the infamous power behind the infamous government that has reduced Assuria to bankruptcy and starvation."

"Recently the power of the scientist party has increased tremendously, until it now constitutes the hope of Assuria and the only menace to the criminal coterie that has for so long held the fate of the country in their bloodstained hands."

"The hope of the scientists lay in the young Alexander, though only a few knew that he still lived and only one scientist, Michael Sanders, knew where and under what name and disguise. But Danard knew, too, and we have been watching him closely."

"For that purpose Nariva and I gained access to the councils of Danard and his fellows. We learned that Danard had conceived a great ambition and to further it he brought together the malcontents from all parties and formed them into the so-called New Freedom Party."

A *coup-d'état* was planned for next month, when the present government was to be overthrown and a new one proclaimed with Danard provisional president. The next step was to be a dictatorship, following which Danard was to seize all the reins of government, announce an empire and crown himself Science Ruler of Assuria.

"There was every possibility for the success of his bold play. The greatest obstacle lay in the existence of the rightful heir to the science throne—Alexander would constitute an ever-present menace to his power. Danard, therefore, determined to search out young Alexander and kill him; but Danard was clever. Really, he trusted no one, and made no confidants. Until tonight not even we who were closest to him realized his true intentions.

"His party consisted of many factions all of which must be appeased. He claimed, therefore, that he was coming to America to find Alexander and to prevail upon him to return to Assuria as the first president of the new science republic, thus winning the confidence of both the lukewarm scientists who had joined his forces and the out-and-out Freedom advocates as well.

"Nariva and I were sent by the true scientists to watch him, for Sanders, naturally, feared the man's every motive. We had the greatest difficulty in locating Alexander, due to the fact that his present calling is such that he was forced to assume an identity different from that which we were told would reveal him to us. None of us knew him by sight—not even Danard, while the young man himself is ignorant of his true identity.

"We have searched for months. Tonight we found him. Danard got the first clue yesterday morning, but said nothing to us. Saran clinched it a few minutes after Mr. Thorn was murdered, as did I, though I think Danard may have told Saran earlier in the night—that, I do not know.

"Lieutenant Donovan, I do not need to tell you who the heir to the science throne is, nor the gratitude that every true Assurian owes you for your faithful service to Science Empire. I should like to be the first to salute my future ruler, but there is one who better deserves that honor," and once again he turned and bowed to Nariva. "As her father has given his fortune, so she has dedicated her life and risked it many times for the sake of the Scientists of Assuria."

Nariva smiled and inclined her head toward Greeves, then she turned to Macklin Donovan, and, curtsying low before him, took his hand in hers and raised it to her lips. "Sir, I salute you!" she said.

DONOVAN grasped her arm and raised her to her feet. His face was flushed with embarrassment. He drew her close to him and threw an arm about her waist, as he turned toward Greeves.

"What is the meaning of all this idiocy?" he demanded.

"It is the truth, Your Majesty," replied Greeves. "Lieutenant Donovan can assure you of all that."

"I think you've all gone crazy," snapped Macklin Donovan, "and anyway all this has nothing to do with the business that interests me now—who murdered Mason Thorn, and why? There is a great deal more to be explained, Greeves, too. I want the history of the past few hours—not the history of Assuria."

"Very well, Majesty."

"Cut the 'Majesty'!"

"Yes, Maj—yes, sir!" assented Greeves with a smile. "Yesterday morning you were followed to and from Lieutenant Donovan's home. That was evidently Danard's first direct clue as to your identity. He thought you a spy employed by the scientists. When he found who you really were he told us that he had discovered that you were about to expose us to the United States Government. Of course, such a step would have effectively ruined all his plans. He said you must be killed.

"Nariva and I tried to warn you, though we had no idea who you really were. Saran forged the note that was slipped under your door, and that was to lure you to your death. Poor Mr. Thorn chanced to pass through the hall at the instant you were expected and the bullet that was intended for you killed him. It was fired by Danard from Nariva's closet, which is also a radio-transmitter of matter.

"Nariva realizing that you were to be shot, hastily printed a note of warning, passed back through Saran's closet to the other building and thence to your closet, in which there is a small look-out panel, which opens as a slide. When you went to your dressing room, she entered the outer room and placed the note on your table where you discovered it.

"After she left your room to return to her own she heard the shot and thought it was you who had been killed. She screamed.

"Saran, too, thought that you had been killed. Possibly he showed surprise when he discovered that it was Mr. Thorn whom Danard had murdered by mistake, for he certainly must have been surprised and shocked too, since Mr. Thorn was to have financed the stroke that they expected would result in giving Assuria a new government."

"What did my father have to do with it?" demanded Percy Thorn.

"Your father was very much deceived. He thought that he was aiding mankind with his money, but he was only playing into the hands of unscrupulous tricksters. I do not know all that they told him, but you may be sure that little or none of it was truth."

"Go on with the story of what happened here this night," directed Terrance Donovan.

"Well, Nariva had difficulty getting back to her room without being observed by Danard, and she only did reach it just as you were about to have the door broken in. She was sure you had been killed, Mr. Donovan, and she told me that she almost betrayed herself when she discovered you alive.

"After you all went to the library she returned to the other building to watch Danard and the others. It was in the library that I at last realized your true identity for I knew that the reputed son of Lieutenant Donovan was in reality Alexander of Assuria. I immediately hastened to the other building and acquainted Nariva with the facts.

"She had just learned something else from one of Danard's men. Immediately after Mr. Thorn had

been killed Saran had gone to his room as had most of the others and from there he had entered Mr. Donovan's room by the outer balcony and hidden Mr. Donovan's needle pistol beneath the mattress. Nariva barely had time to reach the room and remove the weapon before the police searched it.

"At last we determined that we must tell you of your danger, but when Nariva attempted to do so in the hallway Saran discovered her and interfered. From then on he was suspicious, and we had difficulty in even getting the little notes of warning to you.

"Saran attempted to reach your room and stab you to death with a dagger belonging to Nariva. I tried to shoot him from an upper window, but succeeded only in knocking the dagger from his hand.

"Then, a few minutes later, Nariva discovered that Saran was planning to enter your closet and shoot you from the small panel. It was then that she shot Saran from his closet as he was about to enter it on his way to your closet.

"To shield herself she ran to Danard and told him that one of the police had killed Saran. As there were papers on his body that Danard did not want to fall into the hands of the police he sent men to bring Saran's body to the other building. When they had done so it was discovered that Saran was only stunned by a scalp wound, and he soon recovered.

"At the same time that Saran was shot Danard was in your closet waiting for Saran. He heard the shot, feared interference, and fired at you through the panel in your closet door. He did not wait to note the effect of this shot, but transmitted to the other building.

"The last time we warned you Saran was on his way again to get you and Nariva had to throw the note from the closet of your room. At the same time I made my way to Saran's room, determined at last that I must tell you face to face of your great danger. It was then that you caught me, sir.

"There is not much more to tell, that you do not already know. You nearly killed Nariva when you fired at the light shining from your closet. She had been hiding there, expecting either Saran or Danard, or both, to come again in search of you. She dimly discerned someone on the balcony and turned the light upon them—it was Saran, as you know. The light frightened him away.

"Then she turned the light on you to make sure that it was you and not Danard. When you fired at her you missed her head by scarce an inch and she transmitted herself, fearing you might fire again. She had already removed the key from the outside lock by the simple expedient of reaching through the small aperture in the door—the same one through which Danard fired and that she used to shine the flashlight on Saran and you.

"When you followed Saran it was I who dragged you into the closet and then hustled you to your own room in the Thorn penthouse.

"I guess that is all, Lieutenant," Greeves concluded.

"I have tried to cover every point, and now won't you explain to—ah—er, his majesty, who he really is?"

"Wait a moment," said Terrance Donovan. "Not so fast. A week ago I could have told him, for I thought I knew. Now I'm damned if I know. We got a letter from Michael Sanders then. It told me something about his fears of a plot to assassinate Mackie, and for us to watch him very close as the time was almost ripe for him to return to Assuria.

"When I read the letter to my wife she fainted, and when she came out of the faint she suffered a stroke. She has only rallied partially a couple of times since, and then she told me something that I don't know whether to believe or not, when the condition of her mind is taken into consideration. She kept cryin': 'I can't let him go—my little Mackie, my little Mackie!' And then, just in broken bits, she told me that he is our son—that it was Alexander who died on the stratosphere liner comin' over, an' I always thought that it was our own boy that died."

Greeves appeared dumbfounded.

"Can we not go to your wife at once and explain the necessity of knowing the truth," he insisted. "The fate of Assuria hangs in the balance—the happiness and prosperity of countless millions of people."

Lieutenant Donovan hesitated. "She is close to death's door," he said.

"But your promise to the Science Ruler!"

"Very well, we will go," he said, "but whether we shall question my wife or not depends upon the decision of the doctor."

It was already daylight when they entered the aerial taxi that had been summoned to take Terrance Donovan, Greeves, Nariva and Macklin to the bedside of Mrs. Donovan. The police lieutenant and Greeves occupied one of the cabs, Nariva and Macklin the other. As they drove off Mrs. Peabody Glasscock turned to Percy Thorn with a sickly smile.

"And to think," she said, "that you have been entertaining the future Science Ruler of Assuria without suspecting his true identity! But really, didn't you notice, Percy, his distinguished and majestic mien? Quite noticeable and *very* impressive."

In the second cab Macklin Donovan and Nariva sat in silence that was presently broken by the man.

"Before I knew who you were I told you that I loved you," he said.

"Before I knew who you were I told you that I loved you," she replied; "but now we must forget all that. You see how impossible it is."

"If I am a Ruler nothing should be impossible. If I am only Mackie Donovan, the son of an Irish policeman, though, that will make the difference, for how could such aspire to the hand of a War Minister's daughter?"

"I pray to God you are only Mackie Donovan, dear," she whispered, "for then I can show you how easy it is to win her."

He took her in his arms. "Prince of Science or Mackie," he said. "I'm going to marry you."

ROMANCE OF THE ELEMENTS..... Aluminum

THE ROMANS HAD A NAME FOR IT. . . !

THE ANCIENT ROMANS DYED THEIR BRIGHT CLOTHES WITH A WHITE SALT CALLED "ALUMEN" PROBABLY A MIXTURE OF ALUMINUM AND IRON SULPHATES.



MONEY TO EXPERIMENT ON A LARGE SCALE WAS CHEERFULLY SUPPLIED DEVILLE BY NAPOLEON III WHO DREAMED OF A LIGHT METAL TO USE IN THE MAKING OF ARMOR AND HELMETS FOR HIS PRIZED CUIRASSIERS!

INSTEAD, HE WAS PRESENTED WITH A BABY'S RATTLE FOR HIS INFANT SON, THE PRINCE IMPERIAL. THIS RATTLE WAS THE FIRST USEFUL ARTICLE MADE FROM ALUMINUM.



WHEN BUNSEN AND DEVILLE SIMULTANEOUSLY ISOLATED METALLIC ALUMINUM BY ELECTROLYSIS IN THE 1850'S IT WAS TRULY A PRECIOUS METAL. IN THE SPRING OF 1856 A POUND OF IT COST \$90.90! THE PRICE, THAT SAME AUTUMN, HAD BEEN CUT TO \$27.27.

TODAY ALUMINUM CAN BE HAD FOR ABOUT 20¢ A POUND.



'ALUMINIUM' OR 'ALUMINUM'?

THE ENGLISH SAY "ALUMINIUM"—THE AMERICANS, "ALUMINUM". ODDLY ENOUGH, AMERICANS SPELL AND PRONOUNCE IT AS RECOMMENDED BY ONE OF BRITAIN'S MOST EMINENT EARLY 19TH CENTURY SCIENTISTS . . . SIR HUMPHREY DAVY

ARKANSAS. . .

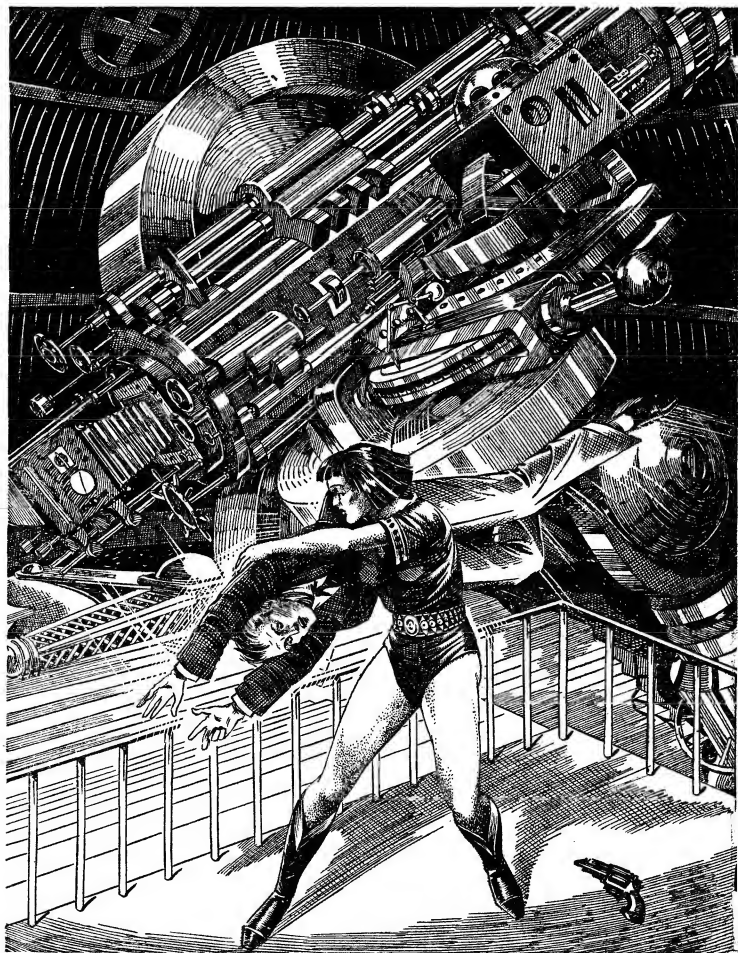
ONE OF THE SEVEN STATES POSSESSING BAUXITE DEPOSITS IS THE **ONLY** STATE WHOSE BAUXITE IS USED IN PRODUCING ALUMINUM.



ONE SEVENTH OF THE EARTH'S CRUST IS COMPOSED OF ALUMINA, THE OXIDE OF ALUMINUM. IT IS THE MOST PLENTIFUL OF ALL THE METALLIC ELEMENTS!

A LUMINUM, in alphabetical order, leads the table of elements, but in the International Table of Atomic Weights of the Chemical Elements, it is number 13. It is identified by the symbol **Al** and its atomic weight is 26.97. It is a silvery metal, resembling tin in appearance. Its melting point is 659° and its

density is 2.6. It is malleable and ductile, especially at 100-150°. It is a good conductor, but difficult to work on a lathe or polish. Aluminum tarnishes but slightly, a film of oxide preventing further action. It is a powerful reducing agent. It is classified in Group III of the Periodic Table: related to Boron and the rare earth metals.



She picked him up easily, and with a swift motion, threw him over her shoulder

THE GOLDEN AMAZON

By **THORNTON AYRE**

Violet Ray, mystery woman of space, comes to earth on an errand of destruction, and Chris Wilson follows into the void, seeking revenge

CHAPTER I

Mutiny—2040 A.D.

COMMANDER BEDSON stood in the control room of the Earth-Mars space liner with his technicians beside him.

"Red Tanner again, eh?" he asked the chief engineer grimly.

"Yessir. He's making trouble in the rocket rooms and he's got the men right with him. You know his line—better wages and conditions for the rocket men."

"Better wages!" Bedson exclaimed in exasperation. "My God, does the fool think I run the damned service? We all want better wages—but when a service is only at the beginning it can't pay much. We are just the pioneers, so we've got to put up with it . . ."

"Trouble is, trying to pacify him," the chief engineer muttered.

"You've got to pacify him, Mr. Dutton!" the Commander snapped. "We can't afford to have trouble below. We've passengers to think of, and that special supply of Saturnian bacteria for analysis by the Martian laboratories. With cargo like that aboard—"

Bedson broke off and took a deep breath, stared through the port with his hawkish eyes. "Besides, right now we're dangerously close to the Venusian gravity-field.

The slightest error in power might wreck the ship. Get below, Mr. Dutton, and keep strict order at all costs."

"I'll do my best, sir."

The engineer turned to the door, then he paused as it flew open under the force of a mighty kick. Red Tanner, the source of all the trouble, stood on the threshold, a flat metal flask clutched in his hand.

"Drinking again, eh?" Dutton breathed. "Now I get it! No wonder you're all burned up! Put that damned elephant-juice away, Red, and get back to work—"

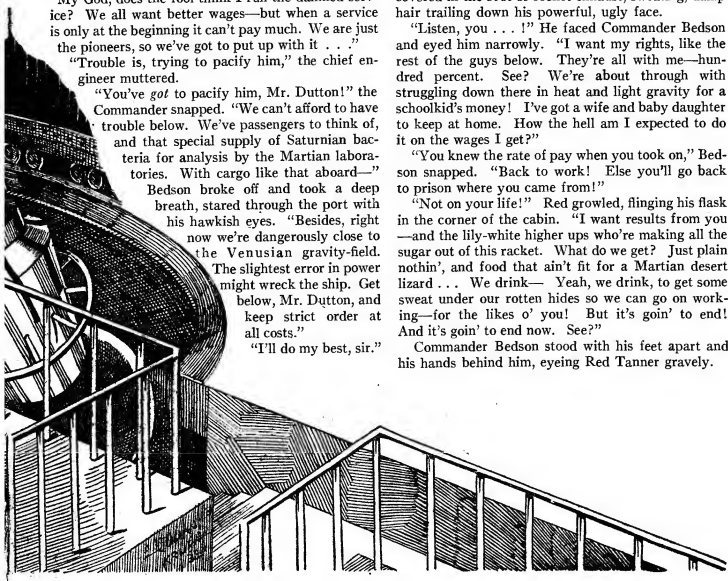
"Aw, shut up!" Tanner broke in sourly. He levered his vast bulk into the control room and stood among the officers, swaying on his feet. In size he was colossal—a six-foot-six giant of a man, nearly naked, covered in the soot of rocket exhaust, sweating, damp hair trailing down his powerful, ugly face.

"Listen, you . . . !" He faced Commander Bedson and eyed him narrowly. "I want my rights, like the rest of the guys below. They're all with me—hundred percent. See? We're about through with struggling down there in heat and light gravity for a schoolkid's money! I've got a wife and baby daughter to keep at home. How the hell am I expected to do it on the wages I get?"

"You knew the rate of pay when you took on," Bedson snapped. "Back to work! Else you'll go back to prison where you came from!"

"Not on your life!" Red growled, flinging his flask in the corner of the cabin. "I want results from you—and the lily-white higher ups who're making all the sugar out of this racket. What do we get? Just plain nothin', and food that ain't fit for a Martian desert lizard . . . We drink— Yeah, we drink, to get some sweat under our rotten hides so we can go on working—for the likes o' you! But it's goin' to end! And it's goin' to end now. See?"

Commander Bedson stood with his feet apart and his hands behind him, eyeing Red Tanner gravely.



"Red, either you get below or I'll have you clapped in irons. You've one more chance— Get moving!"

"All I want are results!" Red breathed, his gray eyes gleaming. "I want you to sign a statement saying the conditions are rotten for us; I want you to try and get us better pay—"

"I can't do it. That's for the Board to decide."

"You mean you *won't*!" Red bellowed suddenly. "You're too afraid of your own job, that's why! By God, give me one chance to get even with the higher-ups! One chance is all I ask— And I'm making a start right now!"

He swung to the doorway again. "O. K., boys!" he roared. "Come and get it!"

He twisted back again into the control room, slammed out his mighty fist with terrific power. It caught the Commander under the jaw and sent him flying into unconsciousness before he had the chance to realize what had happened.

In dazed horror Engineer Dutton suddenly knew what had occurred. The rest of the men must have followed Red up from the rocket-rooms, had waited the outcome of the meeting before striking. And now—? Down there in the nerve-center of the ship there was nobody in control, nobody to fire the blasts against Venus' decisive tuggings.

"Wait!" Dutton screamed. "Wait, you fools! It means death for the lot of us if—"

He went down with a blinding light before his eyes. Red stood over him, separated from the rest of the battle for a moment.

"Hell, but I wish you were that dirty rotten skunk of a brother of mine—" he whispered. "How I'd like to sock him like I socked you!"

He swung, fists clenched again, as an officer charged for him. Wild pandemonium descended on the control room— The noise of it spread through the entire mass of the great vessel.

IN the dining room the Venusian pull was evident. The ship was tilted sideways, hurling crockery, tables and people to one side with earthquake effectiveness. Mirrors splintered, women screamed, the pianist died at the grand piano as it slammed into his stomach.

Richard Ray jumped up shaking scalding soup from his trousers; then he clutched his frightened wife, Joyce, to safety in the nick of time as an electroliner came hurtling down in a thousand razor-edged shards.

"A wreck!" screamed a voice. "We're falling toward Venus!"

"Man the escape ships!"

"The baby!" Joyce cried in sudden horror. Then with her husband beside her she turned and blundered with mad desperation through a darkened confusion of people that was smeared with starlight, Venuslight, and spurts of flame as electric wires fused against wooden paneling.

Somehow the two staggered up the jammed staircase to their cabin, snatched up the precious bundle

from its cot and raced outside again. They clung to each other, fighting through the panic-stricken mob, jostled, and scratched, until suddenly they stopped in a dazzling flood of blinding spotlight.

An officer was visible, ray pistol in hand, standing at the airlock of a safety vessel.

"Women and children first!" he bellowed. "The first man that tries to pass this doorway will be shot down. . . . Quickly, please!"

Joyce hesitated for a moment, then she found herself pushed forward by Dick. She caught a glimpse of his tragic eyes staring after her, then he was lost in the crowd. Helplessly, her precious bundle clutched to her breast, she plunged through the airlock into the dim interior.

The rest was a mad nightmare to her. Women upon women seemed to pile on top of her. In vain the pilot cried out that there was no room. . . . He had to have space to work the rocket-tubes—

With a terrific effort Joyce did the only thing possible with the baby, raised her arms over her head and held it free of the press that hemmed her in with ever tightening force. . . . She felt the ship jolt into space at last, lost all feeling in her numb, anguished arms. From the midst of a half-faint she could hear frantic shouts.

"I must have room to control! *I must have room!*"

"My God, we're falling— *Falling!*"

Joyce heard no more than that. Unbearable pressures beat round her heart and lungs. Darkness swamped in upon her in a vast roaring tide. . . .

CHAPTER II

Twenty Years After

CHRIS WILSON was rather proud of his position as Acting Superintendent of the New York Lunar Observatory. For five years now he had ruled over the staff of this unique building in the very heart of New York, admiring and admired by his staff. The main object of the place was to chart a titanic map of the moon from some seven million separate three-dimensional photographs, a task which demanded perpetual nightly accuracy at the controls of the monstrous photographic reflector in the building's summit.

More often than not Chris worked the reflector alone, sitting, a shock-haired, broad shouldered figure in the center of the controlling machinery, his fingers, playing on an apparatus resembling a typewriter keyboard which controlled the mammoth so close to him.

In a way it was monotonous, but interesting. At least it was a life job, and that in the frantic, hasty-mad world of 2060 was worth having. . . .

On this night of January 7 Chris sat as usual under the vast glassite dome of the building's lofty summit, hands idle in front of the keyboard, his dark eyes glancing ever and again from the monstrous telescope to the floodlit beacon towers of New York City. . . . The whole metropolis was spread out below him, a

crazy jigsaw pattern of a million lights and shadows. To the scrambling hordes down there the moon was just a useful adjunct to a dark night: to him it was his life.

With a faint smile on his generously planned face he glanced toward the faint flush on the eastern horizon. Moonrise was due in half an hour. He sat back to wait, his controls all ready to begin the usual night's work. In those few moments of relaxation he thought of many things—

The busy workers in the rooms below the observatory, for instance, all engaged on this one lunar task; then he thought of the girl who had just left him after a surprise visit—Dorothy Rennat, the girl he hoped to shortly make his wife—a slim, rather timid blonde and the niece of Alva Rennat, the space-way magnate who had been directly responsible for financing this Lunar Observatory.

Chris smiled as he thought of them both. He knew exactly what they would be doing this evening after dinner—playing Martian Bridge in the girl's up-town apartment. Martian Bridge had a weird fascination all its own. . . . Chris had no time for such things. His life was bound up with maps, scientific interests, interviews with spacemen to check the details of Lunar points of interest. He took a vast interest in the spaceways, smiled as he thought of the antiquated minuteneering ships of twenty years before.

He glanced up suddenly as the flush in the east deepened. At the same moment his eye caught sight of a glittering space machine, amazingly fast and amazingly small, hurtling dangerously near his glassite dome. For a second he held his breath in frozen expectation of a crash—then the little bug had scorched into the night with a roar of its tubes.

"Crazy fool. . . ." he muttered; but something was sticking in his mind. He had seen the name *Ultra* on that ship for a flashing instant. He frowned, remembered he had heard the name before in connection with a mysterious woman of the spaceways. Some called her a criminal, others a goddess—but all called her "The Golden Amazon. . . ."

"Wonder why?" he mused; then with a shrug he turned back to his control panel, poised his fingers ready to maneuver the reflector into place. A faint sound reached him as he waited, but necessity demanded all his attention on the telescope—at least upon the hair-lined sights that piloted the thing.

He sat rigid, eyes fixed on the guiders—yet through the time he sat there he was aware of further strange noises. A faint creak finally forced him to look up impatiently.

"Get out of that chair—immediately!" commanded a voice from behind.

UTTERLY astounded he stared at the emergency exit doorway to the roof. It was swinging wide now, its lock blasted away with soundless fire. On the threshold, silhouetted against the night outside, was a girl. Perhaps she was five feet eight tall, clad in

brief shorts and sleeveless garment of some shimmering substance, while upon her feet were perfect fitting skin sandals.

Such a vision, against the stinging cold of the night, was next door to incredible. For several seconds Chris could not speak. He sat drinking in the girl's flawless form, the curious golden tinge of her satiny skin, the cobalt-blue of her short, waving hair. Her eyes, startlingly vivid against the gilded tint of her face, were deepest violet.

"Well, how much longer are you going to be?" she asked abruptly, waving the gun she held in her hand. "Come here! Quick!"

Chris got slowly to his feet, eyeing her steadily as he went forward. He caught a glimpse of a small space machine on the roof outside, the name *Ultra* on its prow.

"So you're the one they call the Golden Amazon?" he asked shortly.

She nodded her blue-black head slowly. "I believe they call me that, yes. My real name is Violet Ray, if you must know— But never mind that! Right now you're going to do as I say. Come here. . . ."

Chris gave a faint smile—then with a sudden vast leap he hurled himself forward, his powerful hands closing round the girl's wrists. Grimly he forced her backwards— Then he got the shock of his life. Her gun dropped, yes, as he had intended; but she recovered herself instantly. Like an uncoiled spring she straightened up, tore herself out of his clutch and closed fingers of steel round his left elbow and right knee. Before he could realize what was happening he was flying through the air like a sack of coals, landed dazed and bewildered a few feet from the *Ultra*.

"Hell. . . ." he breathed uncertainly, shaking his head violently. That had been no ju-jitsu trick; just plain superhuman strength. He glanced up to find the girl standing over him, her gun back in her hand.

"Better take it easy," she advised quietly. "Get in that ship—and I'm not fooling, either."

"Golden Amazon is right," he muttered, scrambling up; then before he could speak again a shove of a golden arm sent him spinning into the ship's control room. The girl followed him up, slammed the airlock and seated herself at the controls.

"Just what is this? A snatch?" Chris asked bluntly. "Keep quiet and watch!" the girl retorted.

From sheer interest he did as bid. He stood gazing down on the shining glassite hemisphere of the observatory as the girl set the *Ultra* circling over it with consummate ease. Then she pulled out a switch, sat watching with her beautiful face set in determined lines as something dropped from a trap in the bottom of the ship and hurtled downward.

CHRIS gazed in stony horror, appalled as he saw the whole mass of the observatory below go mushrooming outward in the smother of an explosion. Clearly the object had been an atomic bomb of devastating power. By the time the dust had settled

there was nothing left on top of the building, nothing but ashes and crumbled metal girders.

"You—you devil!" he gasped out abruptly, wheeling round with a livid face. "You destroyed the reflector, my work, everything that—"

"Nobody was hurt and the *arium* floor of the observatory would save the workers in the lower quarters from injury," Violet Ray replied, her blue eyes gleaming strangely. "I had to destroy that observatory to-night . . . And I just managed it," she finished, gazing out toward the rising moon.

"But—but why?" Chris yelled. "It was wanton destruction! By God, those people who call you a special criminal are dead right! There was no need for that—!"

"There was every need," the girl cut in; then with a contemptuous glance, "You don't need to worry. I don't want you. I only brought you along to save you getting hurt . . . I'll return you to the city center."

Chris hesitated on saying something as she turned back to the controls. His eyes went up and down her magnificent figure, the round smoothness of her supple bare arms and shoulders. There was a pliance and hidden strength in that form such as he had never known. He wondered how she endured the intense cold of a January night in such scanty attire.

"I've heard a lot about you," he said at last, trying to forget the incident of the observatory for the moment. "You're a criminal who works solo, aren't you? A mystery woman?"

"There are various accounts of me . . ." The girl dipped the ship toward the light spotted haze of the city center.

"The name of Violet Ray is of course assumed?"

"No. My father was Richard Ray and my mother Joyce Ray. They both died in a space wreck twenty years ago . . . Most people know that."

"I didn't."

The girl glanced up momentarily. "Well, you do now! Venusian Hotlanders found me alive when I was a baby. They took care of me. I grew up in the environment of Venus, and for reasons which I may one day explain, that environment did things to me. It made me utterly unlike any other woman—both in strength and intelligence. From ship's records I found my name entered in the passenger list as Violet . . . The original ship crashed on Venus, of course. I spent years in learning, helped by a super-keen intelligence. I modeled a space machine like the small safety ships that had dropped to Venus. To match my name I called my ship the *Ultra*—"

She broke off, adjusted the controls. "But I've no more time now. This is where we part."

As the ship finally settled Chris turned to the airlock and opened it. He could not make up his mind whether to love or hate this amazing girl with the contemptuous manner and the mysterious past. She decided the issue for him by bringing out her gun.

"Outside quickly. I don't want mechanics coming round. . . ."

Chris stepped outside to the floodlit expanse of metal landing park.

"Wherever you see the name *Ultra* you'll find me," she said softly, looking down at him with her fascinating eyes. "I'm glad to have met up with you—Chris Wilson . . ."

"Then you know my name—!"

Chris broke off. The airlock had closed adamantly. He stood in perplexed silence, watching as the little but incredibly fast ship hurtled to the upper heights in a flare of sparks. Then it was lost to sight in the dark.

For a long minute he stood pondering, the memory of the girl swamping his mind—then his thoughts drifted back to the commonplace and the thing she had done. His jaw hardened.

Alva Rennat must be notified immediately of course. He turned and set off for the main city traffic ways, boarded a tube express for the residential quarters.

ALVA RENNAT was playing Martian Bridge with Dorothy at the girl's apartment when Chris broke in.

"Mr. Rennat, we've work to do! The observatory's been blown up—and I've had a brush with that woman who's called the Golden Amazon, otherwise Violet Ray!"

"What!" Rennat shot to his feet, overturning the table in his excitement. He was a ponderous man, triple chinned, beady-eyed, and as bald as a stratosphere globe.

"Violet Ray!" Dorothy cried, twisting round in her chair so suddenly that her ash-blond hair tumbled over her eager, sympathetically beautiful face. "Oh, Chris, what's she like? I've heard of her of course and— Is she beautiful?"

"Yeah," Chris acknowledged briefly; then he shook the girl's slim, restraining hand away. "I've no time for explanations now, Dot. What we've got to do, sir," he went on, glancing at the big man, "is to get down to Law headquarters and have this girl picked up! Her action was deliberate . . ."

"Confounded meddling busybody!" Rennat snorted, scrambling into his overcoat. "I'll settle her! Come on!"

At the door Chris hesitated a moment, seeing Dorothy's crestfallen look.

"Sorry," she smiled, patting her arm. "I guess you're interested in this dame as one woman to another, but— Tell you later. No hard feelings?"

She smiled, winked a blue eye mischievously. "No, of course not. Only I would like to know more of this girl. Being a bit of a hothouse plant myself, I—"

"Later," Chris promised, then he dashed out into the corridor in pursuit of Alva Rennat's bass booming for an uptown express conveyance.

In the depths of the fast taxi Rennat simmered like a geyser.

"Blasted piracy!" he grated. "Damned scandal

to the Twenty First Century! What are the space police for, anyway? Thousands of dollars gone up in smoke! My dollars! I financed the whole thing, remember!" He turned suddenly with beady eyes glittering. "And why the heck didn't you stop her? You're husky enough!"

"Not for her," Chris muttered, glancing out on the flying night lights. "She's like coiled wire—"

"She can't get away with it!" Rennat avowed firmly, and stared grimly ahead as they came to a street intersection.

Then something happened. Chris Wilson could never figure out exactly what. For instead of the street there was a sudden blinding sheet of blue flame and volumes of choking smoke. The taxi wheeled round wildly and fell on its side. The frames of unbreakable glass buckled and split.

Alva Rennat fell in the midst of the riven metal and landed head downward, a metal bar driven through his jugular vein . . . The world swam before Chris' blurred eyes. He could vaguely understand that he was being dragged clear of the tangled wreckage. There were shouts and the scream of police sirens.

"A bomb!"

"Somebody threw a bomb!"

"You all right, sir?" The blur went from Chris' vision and he found a police officer supporting him.

"Yeah, I think so, but—" Chris rubbed his head dazedly, glanced at the vision of the dead, blood-spattered Alva Rennat. He turned away, sickened.

"Back, please! Back!" commanded the police, forming a cordon.

Chris stood swaying on his feet, his brain clearing by degrees. Somebody had tried to stop them from reaching Law headquarters—and nearly gotten away with it too! More of Violet Ray's handiwork? Chris' brain cleared suddenly as a chain of thoughts assumed crystal clearness—Dorothy! They might try and get her too!"

He swung round and pushed his way through the eager knot of sightseers. After ten minutes of frantic running he gained the apartment building, jumped into the personal elevator and sent it whizzing up its suction tube. The instant he reached the girl's door and received no answer to his thunderous hammerings he began to sense the worst. It did not take him two minutes to unearthen the janitor and have him open the door with duplicate keys.

In the main living room both of them paused, their eyes automatically directed to the mirror over the electric fire. It contained one word executed in purple chalk—"Ultra!"

CHAPTER III

Pursuit to Venus

"SAY, mister, what does that mean?" the janitor asked at last, pulling down his long underlip un-

certainly.

"Plenty, I guess!" And Chris dived through into the neighboring bedroom, searched in every direction. There was no sign of Dorothy, nor of disorder—but it did strike him as significant that her outdoor clothes had vanished from the locker contrived for the purpose.

"Did you see Miss Rennat leave here during the last half hour?" Chris demanded, coming back to face the janitor.

"No, sir—can't say as I have. I—"

"O.K., skip it. I think I've got something." Chris was looking at the drawn-back catch of the window. He threw the sash open, twisted his head outside and stared at the fire-escape leading to the flat roof.

"Now I get it," he breathed, withdrawing his head and flipping the janitor a coin. "Thanks a lot. . . ."

He dived outside to the phone booth in the corridor. Frantically he dialed the number of Space Headquarters. The voice of Grant Chambers, his most useful friend, came over the wire.

"Oh, hallo, Grant. This is Chris. . . . Look, I want some dope urgently. That Golden Amazon dame's blown up the Lunar Observatory and then snatched my girl. She also got away with killing Alva Rennat, and nearly killed me. . . ."

"Holy Cats! What do you want me to do?"

"As I figure it she's made a dash into space. Tell me what space ships have left in the last half hour. Some must have passed through the General barrier atop the Heaviseide Layer. Was there a ship called *Ultra* among them?"

"Hang on; I'll take a look at the record tapes."

Chris stood drumming his fingers on the kiosk panel. Then the voice resumed.

"A ship called *Ultra* beat the police barrier at Heaviseide and skipped through at the hell of a lick! Police pursued it for five hundred miles, but were hopelessly outdistanced. Anyway, five hundred miles is beyond the law limit and under no planet's control. Ship was heading Venus way."

"Right!" Chris' dark eyes gleamed. "I'm going right after it! And you can do me a big favor, Grant. Tell the police at Heaviseide that I'm following Golden Amazon and will go right through their barrier. I'll carry the Free Light to warn them as I approach. You can fix that?"

"Sure! And good hunting!"

Chris slammed off, dashed to the elevator tube, and so down to street level again. A fast airbus carried him without delay to the space grounds. His official card as Superintendent of the Lunar Observatory did the rest. In ten minutes the mechanics had conducted him to a Zemi-Fletcher Express. *

Chris slipped inside, sealed the airtlock and sat before the familiar controls. One switch fired the *volcanite* fuel in the rockets; another, working in series,

* The Zemi-Fletcher is a one-man space machine capable of terrific speeds and supplied with two guns, one long and one short range, for personal protection.—Author.

controlled each tube independently or collectively at will. . . . With a spurring of underjets he forced the machine into the sky at a pace that made the mechanics below gape in amazement.

Despite his frantic hurry Chris had to slacken off. The crushing acceleration was like a steel hawser round his chest. His chair creaked on its oiled springs; he felt as though he weighed a ton. Little lights danced before his eyes—Then he was easier again, achieved the very maximum possible for physical endurance, sat staring out through the forward window with keen eyes, his jaw set, every scrap of his being concentrated on catching sight of the small bus owned by Violet Ray.

He was through the successive layers of the atmosphere to Heavieside before he hardly realized it. A button switched on the red Free Light on the front of his machine. With devastating speed he went through the ranks of the police guard . . . but the way was clear for him. Grant had done the trick. There was just the courtesy salute, then they were far behind.

And so out into the depths of space—into the confusing wilderness of starlight, moonlight, and sunlight blazing through the ebon eternity of space. Somehow, the void never lost its supernal attraction.

Like a statue Chris sat at his controls, rear tubes still forcing against Earth's gravity field. He stared over the endless vault, at the variety of shipping floating around—heavy freighters, liners, old space tubs from outer planet mines, leisurely hospital and first aid craft, all with their different mark of classification.

In thirty minutes he had left them all behind and was heading in an almost straight line for the blazing orb of silver close by the sun—Venus. He knew that his one hope lay in catching Violet Ray before she got to that planet. Once upon its grim surface, with its Hotland jungles, its mud rivers, its awesome mountains, and there was no telling how he could ever find her, or Dorothy either.

HE coaxed more speed from the machine and sat with his lungs bound up and perspiration pouring down his body. Time and again he went through this self-inflicted torture, relaxing only for brief periods. But space remained empty ahead of him; Violet Ray had had a good start. He used the robot pilot while he ate a meal and snatched a brief sleep—then he was back at his post.

Three times he ate and slept before he awoke to glimpse something in the black deeps ahead—a speck faintly visible to the naked eye against the blinding argent of Venus.

Instantly he turned to the telescopic sights and focused the thing. His heart gave a leap. Though he could not distinguish the name, there was no denying the shape of that bus; it was the *Ultra*.

He put on the power again and gave the ship all it had. By sheer will power and physical strength he hung on against the overwhelming urge to collapse

under the strain. Supports governed the movement of his hands. His jaw lolled from its own weight. Blinding pressure hemmed in on his skull as he drove like a madman across the infinite. . . .

In twenty minutes he had made up hundreds of miles of leeway, drawn close enough to read the ship's name. From the flaring sparks it was pretty evident that Violet Ray had seen him and was suddenly determined to give him a run for his money. Her ship started to draw away with consummate ease. For one thing it was infinitely fast, and for another she was able, by very reason of her strange physical constitution, to stand up to the onslaught of acceleration. How Dorothy fared did not matter, evidently.

Chris let out a vast oath as he began to fall behind. He looked round him desperately, then his eye caught sight of the long-distance energy gun. With colossal effort, the veins bulging on his forehead under the strain, he moved the gun round, sighted it on the steadily receding vessel. Savagely he closed the spark switch and an invisible pencil of energy stabbed over the gap. . . . To his infinite delight one of the *Ultra's* rear rocket tubes crumbled into molten metal.

"Got you!" he yelled. "Chew that one over!"

As he had expected, the *Ultra* slowed down, its power halved. Within minutes his own terrific pace brought him alongside. Through the observation window he could see Violet Ray's grim, set face staring at him. He grinned at her across the void, snapped on the space radio.

"Guess you'd better stop before I blow all your tubes away!"

"Think so?" retorted the girl's laconic voice. "Play this over on your switchboard!"

Chris swung round with a start at a sudden terrific shattering impact from the wall of his ship. The plates flowed with fiendish heat, beat him back from them. Then just as suddenly the invisible energy shifted and he heard his rocket tubes go cracking to blazing one by one. His speed remained constant, since he was in free space, and the *Ultra* still kept level.

"Better put a space suit on!" Violet Ray's voice called. "I'm sending this one for luck!"

Chris watched in dazed horror as the airlock door began to turn red, then violet blue. In another moment it would be shattered—With a hoarse cry he scrambled into his space suit and spun on the helmet as the door crumbled into pure energy. The outward suction of air from the ship sent him spinning to the opening and out. He clutched the rended metal edge with his pincer gloves, saved himself, waved a fist over the infinite.

"Damn you!" he roared, and his chest microphone carried his words to the radio transmitter. "What kind of a hell-fired stunt do you call this? No tubes, no door—Give a guy a break, can't you?"

"Keep your shirt on," said the girl's voice. "I just chopped your ship up a bit to show you you can't bust tubes on the *Ultra* and get away with it. I'm not ma-

rooning you; I rather admire your courage, as a matter of fact. I'm coming alongside; switches will open the outer lock. Come into the control room. . . ."

He waited until the vessel was level, saw the outer door-shield slide to one side. Rather puzzled he passed through the triple locks, closing each one behind him. Violet Ray, a faintly amused smile on her beautiful face, regarded him from the control board as he trooped in.

"Sorry to knock you around, Chris Wilson, but you asked for it," she said, as he took off his helmet. "And now you have caught up with me what exactly do you want?"

"YOU know darned well what I want!" Chris snapped, seizing the girl's firm bare arm. "I want Dorothy Rennat! What was the idea of the snatch?"

The girl shook his hand away. "I don't like being pawed," she smiled; then after a brief silence, "I don't see any reason why I should answer your questions.

After all, on board this ship you take orders, not give them. If you've any doubts just try and start something!"

Chris breathed hard down his nose. He wished the girl would stop smiling at him with her perfect teeth, wished she was not altogether so desirable. It made his task doubly difficult.

"At least tell me if Dorothy is aboard?" he asked stiffly.

"She's aboard." Violet Ray turned back to her controls.

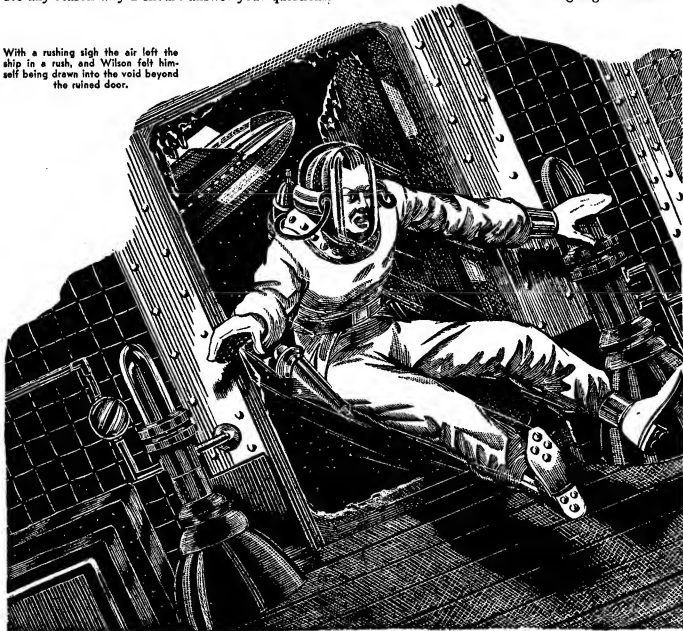
"Why did you take her? Why did you try and kill me? You finished off Alva Rennat, so why not me? I can't understand what you're driving at. . . . I only know I wish you didn't have to do such things."

"Why?" she questioned, staring straight in front of her.

"Well, because. . . . Oh, be hanged to talking! Fetch out Dorothy. I want her to know she's not left alone with a pirate, anyway. She gets scared easy."

"So I've noticed. But I'm not going to fetch her

With a rushing sigh the air left the ship in a rush, and Wilson felt himself being drawn into the void beyond the ruined door.



yet; I can't move from this seat. You know what it's like when you're in a gravity field; and right now my particular worry is Venus. Sit down there where I can keep my eye on you."

Chris glanced at the interdoor leading to other sections of the ship, then at a commanding glance from the girl's vivid eyes he sat down by the control board and watched her operate the switches, working on one set of tubes only. . . . The ship dipped suddenly out of the dark of space into the upper levels of the dense Venusian atmosphere. It screamed through it, burst at last onto the wild, eye-wrenching grandeur of color that was the Hotlands, flanked in the far distance by a mountain range, to the right of which lay a river of swift flowing mud.

"It's a savage world, yet I love it," Violet Ray whispered, her voice unusually quiet. "I know it all, Chris Wilson—inch for inch! Its trees, its twenty-seven-hour day of saturating heat, its tidal mud flows, its honeycombed mountains. . . ."

She stopped talking suddenly, eyed it all speculatively, drove steadily onward over the tree tops. Then at last the ship began to sink gently into a verdure-ridden clearing. The *Ultra* came to a jarless halt.

With a sigh the girl got to her feet, flexed her supple arms, stretched her legs.

"Give me freedom instead of being cramped up in this thing. . . ."

"Tell me something," Chris said, as she turned to the door. "Why have you come here to Venus and brought Dorothy with you?"

She eyed him levelly. "Sometimes, Chris Wilson, I think you deserve a medal as a human questionaire! Why I've come here is my own business. I'll send Dorothy in to you; I've a rocket tube to fix—thanks to you!"

Her eyes flashed at him as she went through the doorway. The massive portal closed after her. Chris got to his feet and fretted around moodily for some five minutes before the door reopened and a pale-faced, disheveled Dorothy came into the compartment, her blue eyes wide in expectancy.

"Chris!" she yelled thankfully, and flung herself into his extended arms. "Oh, Chris, thank Heaven you're safe! I saw your ship catching up to us and I thought— I thought perhaps this Ray woman would kill you."

"Where is she, by the way?" Chris glanced around quickly.

"She went out to mend a tube, or something—Chris, how did you know I'd been kidnaped?"

"Simple enough when that dame wrote 'Ultra' all over your drawing room mirror. I've bad news for you, Dot. Your uncle was killed by a bomb on the way to headquarters—and I only just escaped. I think Violet Ray was mixed up in it somewhere but I can't be certain. . . ."

"Uncle—dead!" The girl stared in front of her in bewilderment for a moment or two. Chris fancied he detected a slight hardening of her mouth; then

finally she gave a helpless shrug. "Well, there it is—and here are we—Lord knows what for! This woman came down the fire escape, told me to dress in outdoor clothes and follow her. So—so I did. I wonder what—"

"Say, do you smell something?" Chris broke in sharply, sniffing.

Dorothy elevated her nose. "Why, I— Yes, it's gas!" she screamed. "Gas from this grating on the floor—" She pointed to her feet, at the vapors rising from between them. With a hoarse cry she stumbled toward the airtlock, but her knees buckled beneath her and she sprawled her length on the floor.

Chris swung around, staggered toward her, but at that instant the choking fumes overpowered his lungs. He went down, gasping, blinded. . . .

CHAPTER IV

True Colors

CHRIS returned to his senses amidst the saturating but cloud-hidden glare of the Venusian sun. Heat beat around him in sickly waves, seemed to rise in a poisonous miasma from the lushy verdure on which he lay. He got up slowly, the effects of the gas clearing rapidly from his head. By his side, still under the influence, sprawled Dorothy. Gently he raised her, went to work with resuscitating movements and was rewarded at last as her eyelids fluttered open.

For a long minute she lay gazing round the clearing, turned at last in wonderment.

"We're—we're in the jungle!"

"How'd you guess?" Chris asked tartly, scrambling to his feet and dragging the girl to hers. "Sure we're in the jungle—but why? Why did Violet Ray leave us in this mess? Nowhere to go, no guide, no food, no weapons—"

"But the forest hasn't anything dangerous in it," Dorothy broke in, examining her curiously designed wrist watch rather anxiously.

Chris looked at her sharply. "How do you know that? When did you see Venus before?"

"Eh? Oh—I've seen it. Toured around the whole system once. . . ."

"Hmmm. . . ." Chris grunted, but he still eyed her. "When you've finished messing around with that wrist watch maybe you'll help me think. . . ." He turned impatiently and stared at the gouged tracks where the *Ultra* had settled, then at the burned undergrowth that testified to the flame of its underjets upon departure. But why had Violet Ray done such a thing? He scratched his sweat-damp head in bewilderment.

"Wish I could figure that dame out," he growled, pondering. "She doesn't look like a murderess and criminal, and yet— Maybe her beauty puts a guy off his guard—"

"Oh, so you think she's beautiful?" Dorothy demanded, coming up to him. "You think she's even

more interesting than I am?"

Chris didn't answer. The girl's outburst had rather astonished him.

"She's just a freak," Dorothy went on sulkily. "At least I'm a normal girl, and that's more than she is! She told me several things about herself on the trip, before we saw your ship catching up on us."

"What things?" Chris demanded keenly.

"Oh, scientific things about her physical powers. What was it, now? Oh, yes. She said that here on Venus cosmic rays are blocked by the succeeding layers of atmosphere, but solar radiations, due to the planet's nearness to the sun, get through. The outcome, in the case of a flesh and blood creature like her, is steady anabolism.* Instead of cells breaking down they build up to ever increasing toughness. Actual Venusians, reacting to a totally different set of radiations and not being flesh and blood, live and die naturally, as do Earth creatures on their own planet. . . ."

"So that's why she's so unique," Chris mused. "And her intelligence will match it! Records of old books, the remains inside the space ship that fell to Venus at the time of the mutiny— She could pick up any language with her brains, and— You got plenty out of her, Dorothy!"

"She volunteered it—boasting of her strength."

"Well, it may explain her physique and upbringing but it does not explain her motives or show us what we're going to do now," Chris sighed. "Any suggestions?"

"Only one. . . . Why not try the mountain range? It's visible through the trees there— At least we might find water."

"O. K. We might even be able to get our bearings for Hotlands City, though I doubt it. . . ."

They turned together, forced their way through the livid verdure, stumbled through lichenous undergrowth, stopping ever and again to recover from the exhaustion begotten of the crushing heat. Venusian life, most of it small, darted and squirmed around and away from them as they moved.

In two hours they forced their way to the foothills and had the jungle behind them. Here the air was somewhat cooler.

FOR a while Chris stood silent, contemplating the rubble and stone leading to the mighty mountain range ahead of them. He looked at the tidal river of mud two miles to the left. The whole scene was wild, gave little hope of civilization. Hotlands City might be a thousand miles away for all he could distinguish to the contrary. He began to curse Violet Ray and all her works under his breath.

* Venus has an extra dense atmosphere probably made up of ionized layers, through which only the life-giving radiations of the sun can penetrate. Normally—on a world like Earth—rays of life and death penetrate to the surface. Scientists believe that solar radiations are necessary to increase of life. They also believe that cosmic rays are responsible for certain weaknesses in physique, and for death. They cause ketabolism, or breakdown of cells.—Ed.

"Well, what do we do?" he demanded at last, swinging round to the girl.

She started to say something, then stopped as a voice behind them broke in.

"You'll walk! Both of you!"

Chris wheeled round, astounded. A man in white ducks had emerged from behind a spur of rock, gun in hand. He was dark, tanned nearly to black with Venusian radiation.

"What the hell—" Chris started to say, but the gun stopped him.

"Never mind the remarks, brother—just march! You too!" he added, glancing at the girl.

To Chris' inward surprise she was apparently quite unafraid: in fact he could have sworn a faint smile of bitter triumph was pulling the corners of her red mouth. She began to walk steadily toward the mountain escarpment with Chris alongside her. At a command from the man in the rear they both stopped at the solid face of cliff.

Chris stared in dumbfounded silence as that seemingly solid mass opened down one half of its length, evidently operated by some concealed turntable switch in control of the man with the gun.

"Keep moving!" he snapped, coming up again.

Without a word they passed down a flight of flood-lit steps out into the rock and so into a roomy cavern filled with shadowless light. Chris' first impression was of twelve faces—hard, grim faces, belonging to men well past middle age. Most of the men were standing, but one was seated at a rough wood table—a giant of a man with the face of an old-time pugilist. Possibly he was fifty, possibly more.

"What the devil are you people doing here?" Chris snapped out at last, as the eyes regarded him steadily.

"You'll find out quick enough," said Dorothy briefly, then with an insolent smile at Chris' astounded expression she went over languidly to the table. In that short walk her manner seemed to change utterly. Her frightened air had gone; her features were grimly set.

"Dot, what's come over you? What—"

"Shut up, you, and listen!" snapped the man at the table, getting to his feet. He came forward, made a motion to the man with the gun in the rear. Chris felt his wrists suddenly pulled behind him and clamped together with steel manacles and link chain.

"WHAT'S the idea?" he asked bitterly. "Some gag of Violet Ray's I suppose?"

"Nope—I've no truck with that dame, young feller. I'm working on my own. . . . Tanner's the name—Red Tanner. Ever heard of it?"

Chris shook his head. The man grinned faintly; then with a sudden scowl he swung round on Dorothy.

"What brought you to Venus, anyway? And with this guy?"

"Violet Ray brought the pair of us," the girl responded. "We were stranded, and I didn't intend cooling my heels out there. . . . So I used the wrist

watch radio signal. I knew we were near this hide-out. . . . As I'd expected you sent Jerry out to find us. . . ."

Red Tanner clenched his fists. "You blasted little fool! You let the position of this hide-out be known with Violet Ray around somewhere maybe? It was a mad thing to do—"

"So you're the big shot of the crime ring that's been puzzling the Earth authorities?" Chris broke in savagely. "Guess I got you all wrong, Dot. . . . You're a two-faced little hypocrite."

"Take it easy!" Red Tanner growled. "This girl's my daughter. . . ."

"Daughter!"

"Yeah! Surprised? Listen, I'll tell you a few things. Since you're going to vanish from sight later it won't matter. . . . I'm an ex-mutineer. See? Twenty years ago I landed on this blasted planet with a few of my buddies—here they are around me. We were stranded. I was a rocket-man in the early days—and why was I one? Because my brother, Alva Tanner, had me shipped off to jail on a false charge, and as was the custom in those days jail-birds could become rocket men if they had the nerve. I took that chance. I started a mutiny for better wages and pay—I lost. For twenty years I've been up and down the system, digging out a living. . . . I only wanted revenge on Alva."

"I heard about him, see? I heard he'd taken my daughter and given her a good education—I'll say that much for him. He'd built a nice new observatory with money made through crooked deals. And I guess he was afraid of me coming back 'cos he switched his surname round to Rennat, which is 'Tanner' spelled backward. I spent a long time trying to figure out how to get my own back. . . ."

Red Tanner paused, slammed his fist on the table.

"I wanted a chance for power, see? I wanted to aim a blow at the peoples of Earth that would give me the chance to rule them if their numbers were demoralized enough to permit of it. I found that chance had come when my men and I happened one day on the remains of the old space ship left from the mutiny. . . . We came across the sealed case of Saturnian bacteria we'd been taking to Mars. Bacteria—multiplying at millions to the hour. Released, the things would wipe out nearly everybody in New York City in a day! But how to get 'em to Earth safely?"

"That was a problem. We'd already started a crime ring between worlds having our headquarters here—but this bacteria job needed somebody quite innocent to put it over. Then our New York worker found that my girl was engaged to a guy in charge of the Lunar Observatory my brother had built! Imagine that!"

"Well?" Chris snapped.

"It was easy. By degrees Dorothy was told the truth, brought here to Venus and—"

"I found out in many ways that Red was my father," the girl said briefly. "I'd always disliked my

uncle anyway, and I was more than willing to help father. I took the bacteria box to Earth and had it fitted with a selenium cell device. Nobody could risk being within a hundred miles of it when it opened—hence remote control. That night I called to see you at the Observatory I put the box in a corner of the mirror-plate. At moonrise the selenium cell would have operated and released the bacteria — The disease would have begun at the most appropriate spot—in the very building my uncle's ill-gotten gains had built. I intended to depart the moment the plague began. . . ."

"YOU would have exposed me to that?" Chris grated out.

"Why not?" Dorothy asked stonily. "I only got engaged to you in the first place because you had a steady job and plenty of money. When I knew about father and his plans you were only a tool— My timidity was a pose, of course. . . . The real trouble was Violet Ray! She poked her nose in and upset the whole thing."

"So I've heard!" Red Tanner breathed venomously. "She blew up the Observatory before the moon rose. How she knew I don't know— Any more than I can figure out why she brought you to Venus, Dorothy. She must have had a reason. . . ."

"Then you were responsible for the taxi explosion?" Chris' voice was level and cold.

The girl nodded as she lounged against the table. "Of course. The moment you and uncle had gone I foresaw trouble, phoned our New York agent. I didn't expect him to be quite so drastic, but . . ."

"At least," Chris said quietly, "I see you in your true colors, Dot. And unless I'm mistaken you'll get nowhere with Violet Ray somewhere around. She'll beat you to it. . . ." He broke off, smiled twistedly. "Funny thing, for awhile I suspected you might be Violet Ray!"

"I'm a woman, not a freak! And don't be too sure she'll get any place. We've got to find her, dad. For years now she's been beating you to it and—"

"She'll be found," Red said obstinately. "And we'll try other ways to get the mastery over peoples on Earth—" He broke off, looked at Chris malignantly. "As to you, wise guy, you're going to disappear from sight—literally. Start walking!"

Chris stared at the gun in Tanner's hand, then he set his jaw and walked across the cavern into a narrow, natural opening in the rocks. It led into a passage, finally ended at a chasm. From the depths came the faint sound of bubbling and swirling.

"Mud river, joining up with the main tidal flow," explained Tanner's grim voice. "I could shoot you, of course—but I might as well save my ray-gun charge and be rid of you just the same."

Chris stood motionless, tugging futilely on the steel fetters about his wrists. Then he swung round, intent on a last desperate bid for liberty—but the iron knuckles of Red Tanner struck him clean between the

eyes. Helpless, he toppled backward over the chasm edge, felt himself falling through emptiness—

He tried to measure seconds to eternity—then suddenly he was brought up short in his fall with a jar that shook the breath out of him. He felt himself lifted sideways, tumbled headlong into rubble and dust.

A strong hand jerked him to his feet. Faintly he could make out the outlines of a face framed in dark hair.

"Violet Ray!" he whispered incredulously. "You—you caught me as I fell?"

"Yes." The way she said it it sounded the simplest thing in the world. "I overheard all that went on above. When a person knows Venus as I do lots of things can be done. . . . Come with me."

"These handcuffs," he said, turning his back to her.

He felt her fingers round his wrists, stood in awe as he felt the links of the connecting chain twist and bend under those more than human hands. Suddenly he was free.

"This way," she breathed, catching his arm.

AFTER some minutes they emerged at a lower level. Shafts of daylight seeping through the cavern roof revealed opposite to them a titanic rock, like a pointing finger, some two hundred feet high. Around it there squirted streams of liquid mud from the exterior.

"Down here we're below river level," the girl explained. "That rock there acts as a natural stopcock—but it's on a balance. A little pushing will move it over. The river will sweep into the breach, and since it is at flood tide it will submerge this cavern here, rise up the shaft down which you were thrown and—"

"Trap the others?" Chris asked in a low voice.

"Yes!" Violet Ray's face was as hard as agate. "You're thinking it's murder—but it isn't. It's justice—When you've lived on Venus as long as I have, battling every day with Nature in its cruelest moods, you'll learn to forget sentiment. . . . Those people up there will start again, with unpredictable results unless we strike first. . . . They'll drown, because I've thrown their exit-rock switch out of action."

Chris said nothing. There was a certain heartless streak in her that rather repulsed him at times. And yet, she was logical enough. He stood watching as she vaulted with consummate ease to the rock stepping stones in the midst of the sloppy mud on the cavern floor. He followed her with difficulty, stopped by her side finally immediately below that finger of rock.

"Any help?" he asked, shoving uselessly against the spire.

She did not answer, pushed him aside rather contemptuously. He stood gazing at her taut, shapely legs as she dug her heels in the shingle. The biceps on her arms and shoulders bulged visibly under the strain she suddenly threw upon herself. . . . But the

rock moved! It swung very slightly from the perpendicular on a central axis.

Again Violet Ray shoved, and again, her mouth tight with effort—then the rock swung over its gravity-center. The weight of the mud river outside was sufficient to finish the job. It tore the rock off its pivot and a deluge came thundering into the cavern.

Chris found himself dashed from the shingle like a fly. Mud was in his eyes, his nostrils, his mouth. It was like swimming in treacle— Then a hand of steel was on his shirt collar. He felt himself dragged upwards, caught a glimpse of a mud-caked golden arm driving with irresistible force through the cloying, sticky mess. He was impelled outward against the current, held his breath as he forced below the river at the cavern mouth . . . then up he came again with that hand still holding him.

He fought his way by his own efforts across the actual river, with the girl right beside him. He could see the vast flow sweeping inwards into the mountain breach, steadily rising even as he watched it. . . . Then at last he felt stones under his feet, floundered up onto the rubbly bank with the mud-plastered girl behind him.

FOR a moment or two she stood watching the flow, wiping the filth from her face.

"I rather think," she said slowly, "that the first link in the crime ring has snapped right here. . . . Ruthless perhaps—but necessary."

Chris caught her arm. "The first link!" he echoed. "You mean there are others?"

"Of course," she answered quietly. "Do you think that that brute of a Red Tanner was the *master* of the whole thing? Oh, no. If he said he was that was just his ego. The bacteria idea was planned by a far cleverer mind than his. Believe me, Chris, there is crime in all parts of the system and Red and his daughter were only spokes in the wheel. I don't know who is back of the troubles, who is trying to master the earth by various diabolical means—but I'll find out. One day . . ."

"Just how did you know about that bacteria attempt?" Chris asked.

"Simple enough," the girl shrugged, peeling mud from her hands. "I knew for a long time that Tanner was on Venus, and from the records of the original ship I knew that he was the original cause of the mutiny. Knowing Venus so well it was no effort for me to locate his hide-out. I had other ways of getting into his place; the mountain is honeycombed. I heard everything he ever had to say, that's why I know he's only a part of the crime ring and not the head of it. . . . Three times he tried to wipe me out, most unsuccessfully."

"Recently I was astonished to find that the case of bacteria had gone from the original ship. I knew Tanner must be responsible, and sure enough I finally overheard of his plans, of how his daughter was to fix them on the lunar phototelescope on a specified

night. My only chance was to fly to Earth immediately and wreck the plot. I did—and the Observatory too. It was the surest way to blast the bacteria out of existence. I had to beat the moonrise . . . and I made it."

"I remember," Chris murmured. "But tell me, why did you bring Dot and me back here and allow us freedom? Knowing Dorothy was the crook she was, why didn't you wipe her out—"

"I kidnapped her from earth to stop her doing any more harm. I was too late to stop her phoning her New York agent; that had to take its chance. I felt somehow that you'd come through, and because I wanted you to follow us I wrote 'Ultra' on the mirror as a clue. . . ."

"Why did you want me to follow?"

"To find out for yourself about Dorothy. I knew no words of mine would ever convince you. She reacted as I had anticipated and gave the signal to the hide-out. . . . Naturally I was always near at hand. I overheard the plan to throw you down the shaft

and was ready and waiting."

There was a long silence. The girl turned at last toward the jungle. Chris followed her thoughtfully.

"You are sure the only reason you left the clue for me to follow you was because of Dorothy?"

Violet Ray stopped, her eyes averted. "It was as good a reason as any," she murmured. "Better follow me; I'll return you to earth safely."

"But I don't want to go back to Earth. I've nothing to go for! And besides, some of the things that have happened have made me want to go on and on—to try and find the source of all the trouble that clutters up the system with piracy, crime, and threats of death."

The girl smiled faintly. "I do get lonely sometimes," she admitted, almost naively. "And there are so many things I have yet to do—things no ordinary woman could do. A partner would be useful perhaps. . . ."

Chris seized her slim, strong hand. "I'm not going back to Earth—yet . . ." he said.

THE TIPPING EARTH

"THE imaginary axis of the earth is not perpendicular. Its departure from the perpendicular is a mile a year. If this keeps up it would take the earth somewhat more than 24,000 years to turn completely over, thus bringing a glacial era every 24,000 years."

This is a quotation from a book by Chase Salmon Osborne, "The Earth Upsets." Mr. Osborne has a number of college degrees but prefers to be known as a former governor of Michigan.

He believes that earthquakes are due to this gradual shifting of the earth with its compensating gravitational effect. He complains that such phenomena are studied as isolated facts with no attempt to study the whole subject of the earth's movements. "The earth is a very mysterious and unstable planet," according to him, "full of noises too loud for us to hear and motions too vast for us to comprehend."

He points out that Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, Capri, Ischia, Lipari and lesser islands off the coasts of Italy were without doubt once a part of the mainland. In time Italy will lose still more territory to the surrounding sea, he believes, notably her "boot." "Japan is due to disappear because it is on the edge of a caving unstable trough in the ocean. The entire archipelago is gradually slipping into

the sea. No one can tell the day or the hour when its complete submergence and consequent destruction will occur. It may be within a decade or a half century or some centuries, but it is coming."

In this country there are continuing movements of the earth sufficiently pronounced to be measured. Charles W. Henderson of the U. S. Geological Survey reports that the mountains in the vicinity of Golden, Colorado, have been moving steadily eastward for years. The lower Mississippi Valley is sinking closer to sea level, while the region around the Great Lakes is being tilted upward. The Atlantic coast sinks at the rate of a foot a century.

Mr. Osborne believes that there was one great continent which in early times split asunder. Of this theory Professor Reginald Daly of Harvard says: "The strongest point in its favor from the standpoint of the layman is that the east coast of South America seems to fit the west coast of Africa almost as perfectly as two parts of a torn sheet of paper. Another point is that the west coasts of North and South America which form the front of the moving land masses are crumpled up into mountain ranges as if from the resistance which they encountered in their slide; while the eastern coasts which form the rear of the movement, thus meeting no resistance, are chiefly flat."

Morrison Colladay

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ADVENTURES

ON SALE
JULY 20th

WATCH
FOR IT!

The MONSTER

By NELSON S. BOND

CHAPTER I

Burch Patterson Returns

ONE nice thing about the Press Club is that you can get into almost any kind of wrangle you want. This night we were talking about things unusual. Jamieson of the *Dispatch* mentioned some crackpot he had heard of who thought he could walk through glass. "Snipe" Andrews of the *Morning Call* had a wild yarn about the black soul of Rhoderick Dhu, whom Nova Scotians claim still walks the moors near Antigonish. Then, a guy named Joe brought up the subject of Ambrose Bierce's invisible beast.

You remember the story? About the diarist who was haunted, and pursued, by a gigantic thing which couldn't be seen? And who was finally devoured by it?

Well, we chewed the fat about that one for a while and Jamieson said the whole thing was fantastic; that total invisibility was impossible. The guy named Joe said Bierce was right; that several things *could* cause invisibility. A complete absence of light, for one thing, he said. Or curvature of light waves. Or coloration in a wavelength which was beyond that of the human eye's visual scope.

Snipe Andrews said, "Nuts!" Winky Peters, who was getting a little tight, hiccupped something to the effect that "There are more things under Heav'n and Earth than are dreamed of in your Philosophy—" and then got in a hell of a fuss with the bartender who said his name *wasn't* Horatio.

I said nothing, because I didn't know. Maybe that is the reason why this stranger, a few minutes later, moved over beside me and opened a conversation.

"You're Harvey, aren't you?" he asked.

"That's me," I agreed. "Len Harvey—chief errand boy and dirst scratcher-upper for the *Star-Telegram*. You've got me, though, pal. Who are you?"

He smiled and said, "Let's go over in that corner, shall we, Harvey? It's quieter over there."

That made it sound like a touch, but I liked something about this guy. Maybe it was his face. I like tough faces; the real McCoy, tanned by Old Sol instead of sunlamp rays. Maybe it was the straightness of his back; maybe the set of his shoulders. Or it could have been just the way he spoke. I don't know.

Anyway, I said, "Sure!" and we moved

to the corner table. He ordered, and I ordered, and we just sat there for a moment, staring at each other. Finally he said,

"Harvey, your memory isn't so good. We've met before."

"I meet 'em all," I told him. "Sometimes they are driving Black Marias, and sometimes they're in 'em. Mostly, they're lying in the Morgue, with a pretty white card tied to their big toe. Or, maybe—Hey!" I said, "You're not Ki Patterson, who used to write for the *Cincinnati News*?"

He grinned then.

"No, but you're close. I'm Ki Patterson's brother, Burch."

"Burch Patterson!" I gasped. "But, hell—you're not going to get away with this!" I climbed to my feet and started to shout at the fellows. "Hey, gang—"

"Don't, Len!" Patterson's voice was unexpectedly sharp. There was a note of anxiety in it, too. He grabbed my arm and pulled me back into my seat. "I have very good reasons for not wanting anyone to know I'm back—yet."

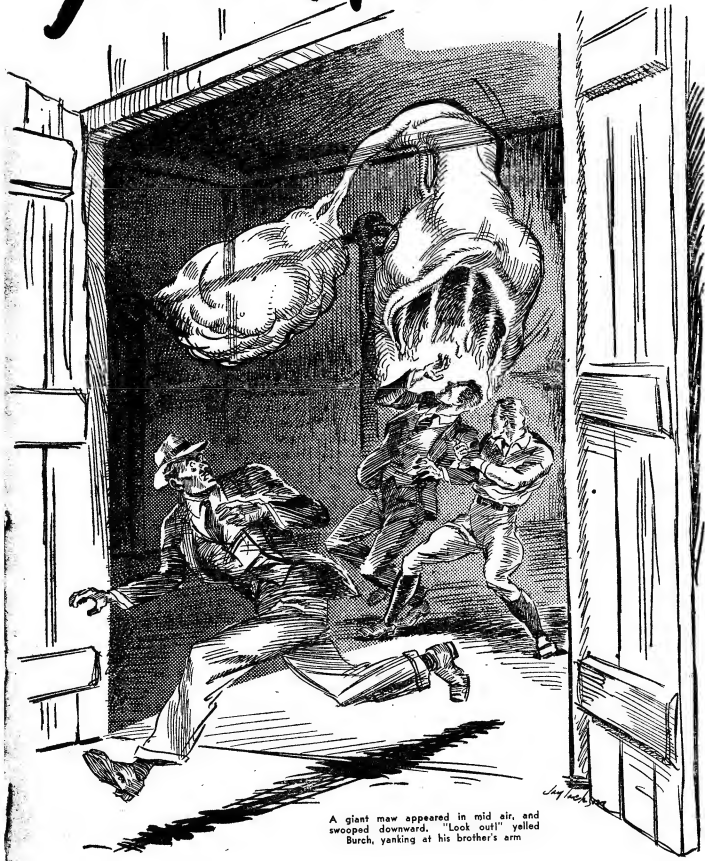
I said, "But, hell, Burch, you can't treat a bunch of newspaper men like this. These guys are your friends."

Now that he had told me who he was, I could recognize him. But the last time I had seen him—the only time I had ever met him, in fact—he had been dressed in khaki shirt and corduroy breeches; had worn an aviator's helmet. No wonder I hadn't known him in civies.

I REMEMBERED that night, two years ago, when he and his expedition had taken off from Roosevelt Field for their exploration trip to the Maratan Plateau in upper Peru. The primary purpose of the trip had been scientific research. The Maratan Plateau, as you undoubtedly know, is one of the many South American spots as yet unexplored. It was Burch Patterson's plan to study the region, incidentally paying expenses *a la* Frank Buck, by "bringing back alive" whatever rare beasts city zoos would shell out for.

**A creature from the other dimension
was this monster from Maratan Plateau.
Out of nowhere it snatched men to..what?**

From Nowhere



A giant maw appeared in mid air, and swooped downward. "Look out!" yelled Burch, yanking at his brother's arm

For a few weeks, the expedition had maintained its contact with the civilized world. Then, suddenly—that was all! A month . . . two months . . . passed. No word or sign from the explorers. The United States government sent notes to the Peruvian solons. Peru replied in smooth, diplomatic terms that hinted Uncle Sam would a damn sight better keep his nutsack adventurers in his own backyard. A publicity-seeking aviatrix ballyhooed funds for a "relief flight"—but was forbidden the attempt when it was discovered she had already promised three different companies to endorse their gasoline.

The plight of the lost expedition was a nine-days' wonder. Then undeclared wars grabbed page one. And the National Air Registry scratched a thin blue line through the number of pilot Burchard Patterson, and wrote after his name, "Lost."

But now, here before me in the flesh, not lost at all, but very much alive, was Burch Patterson.

I had so many questions to ask him that I began babbling like a greenhorn leg-man on his first job.

"When did you get back?" I fired at him. "Where's your crew? What happened? Did you reach the Plateau? And does anyone know you're—"

He said, "Easy, Len. All in good time. I haven't told anyone I'm back yet for a very good reason. Very good! As for my men—" He stared at me somberly. "They're dead, Len. All of them. Toland . . . Fletcher . . . Gainelle . . ."

I was quiet for a moment. The way he repeated the names was like the tolling of a church-bell. Then I began thinking what a woe of a story this was. I could almost see my name bylining the yarn. I wanted to know the rest so bad I could taste it. I said,

"I'm sorry, Burch. Terribly sorry. But, tell me, what made you come here tonight? And why all the secrecy?"

"I came here tonight," he said, "searching for some one I could trust. I hoped no one would remember my face—for it is changed, you know. I have something, Len. Something so great, so stupendous, that I hardly know how to present it to the world. Or even—if I should.

"I liked the way you kept out of that crazy argument a few minutes ago—" He motioned to the bar, where a new wrangle was now in progress. "—because you obviously had an open mind on the subject. I think you are the man whose help and advice I need."

I said, "Well, that's sure nice of you, Patterson. But I think you're overrating me. I kept my yap shut just because I'm kind of dumb about scientific things. Ask me how many words to a column inch, or how many gangsters got knocked off in the last racket war, but—"

"You're the man I'm looking for. I don't want a man with a scientific mind. I need a man with good, sound common-sense." He looked at his wrist watch. "Len—will you come out to my home with me?"

"When?"

"Now."

I said, "Jeepers, Burch—I've got to get up at seven tomorrow. I really shouldn't—"

He leaned over the table; stared at me intently.

"Don't stall, Len. This is important. Will you?"

I told you I was snoopy. I stood up.

"My hat's in the cloak-room," I said. "Let's go!"

CHAPTER II.

The Thing in the Shed

PATTERSON'S estate was in North Jersey. A rambling sort of place, some miles off the highway. It was easy to see how he could return to it, open it up, and still not let anyone know he had returned. As we drove, he cleared up a few foggy points for me.

"I didn't return to the States on a regular liner. I had reasons for not doing so—which you will understand in a short time.

"I chartered a freighter, a junky little job, from an obscure Peruvian port. Pledged the captain to secrecy. He landed me and my—my cargo—" He stumbled on the word for a moment. "—at a spot which I'm not at liberty to reveal. Then I came out here and opened up the house.

"That was just two days ago. I wired my brother, Ki, to come immediately. But he—"

"He's working in L. A.," I said.

"Yes. The soonest he could get here would be tonight. He may be at the house when we arrive. I hope so. I'd like to have two witnesses of that which I am going to show you."

He frowned. "Maybe I'm making a mistake, Len. It is the damndest thing you ever heard of. Maybe I ought to call in some professor, too. But—I don't know. It's so utterly beyond credibility, I'd like you and Ki to advise me, first."

I said, "Well, what the hell is it, Burch?" Then I suddenly remembered a motion picture I'd seen some years ago; a thing based on a story by H. G. Wells. "It's not a—a monster, is it?" I asked. "Some beast left over from prehistoric ages?"

"No; not exactly. At least, I can assure you of this—it is not a fossil, either living or dead. It's a thing entirely beyond man's wildest imaginings."

I leaned back and groaned. "I feel like a darned kid," I told him, "on Christmas eve. Step on it, guy!"

THERE were lights in the house when we got there. As Burch Patterson had hoped, Ki had arrived from California. He heard us pull up the gravel lane, and came to the door. There was a reunion scene; one of those back-clapping, how-are-you-old-fellow things. Then we went in.

"I found your note," Ki said, "and knew you'd be right back. I needn't tell you I'm tickled to death you're safe, Burch. But—why all the secrecy?"

"That's what I asked him," I said. "But he's not giving out."

"It's something," Ki accused, "about the old work shop behind the house. I know that. I was snooping around back there, and—"

Burch Patterson's face whitened. He clutched his brother's arm swiftly.

"You didn't go inside?"

"No. I couldn't. The place was locked. Say—" Ki stared at his brother curiously. "Are you feeling okay, guy? Are you sure you're not—"

"You must be careful," said Burch Patterson. "You must be very, very careful when you approach that shed. I am going to take you out there now. But you must stand exactly where I tell you to, and not make any sudden moves."

He strode to a library table; took out three automatics. One he tucked into his own pocket. The others he handed to us. "I'm not sure," he said, "that these would be any good if—if anything happened. But it is the only protection we have. You *might* be lucky enough to hit a vulnerable spot."

"A vulnerable spot?" I said. "Then it *is* a beast?"

"Come," he said. "I shall show you."

He led the way to the work shop. It lay some yards behind and beyond the house; a big, lonesome sort of place, not quite as large as a barn, but plenty big. My first idea was that at some time it must have been used as a barn, for as we approached it, I could catch that animal odor you associate with barns, stables, zoos.

Only more so. It was a nasty, fetid, particularly offensive odor. You know how animals smell worse when they get excited? Or when they've been exercising a lot? Well, the place smelled like that.

I was nervous, and when I get nervous I invariably try to act funny. I said, "If they're horses, you ought to curry them more often."

I saw a faint blur in the black before me. It was Ki's face, turning to peer back. He said, "Not horses, Len. We've never kept horses on this estate."

Then we were at the door of the shed, and Burch was fumbling with a lock. I heard metal click; then the door creaking open. Patterson fumbled for a switch. The sudden blaze of light made me blink.

"In here," said Burch. And, warningly, "Stay close behind me!"

We crowded in. First Burch, then Ki, then me. And as Ki got through the door, I felt his body stiffen; heard him gasp hoarsely. I peered over his shoulder—

Then I, too, gasped!

THE thing I saw was incredible. There were two uprights of steel, each about four inches in diameter, deeply imbedded in a solid steel plate which was secured to a massive concrete block. Each of these uprights was "eyed"—and through the eyes ran a third steel rod which had been hammered down so that the horizontal bar was held firmly in place by the two uprights.

And on this horizontal rod was—a *thing*!

That is all I can call it. It had substance, but it had no form. Or, to be more accurate, it had every form of which you can conceive. For, like a huge, black amoeba, or like a writhing chunk of amorphous matter, it *changed*!

Where the steel rod pierced this blob of *thing* was a clotted, brownish excrescence. This, I think, accounted for some of the animal odor. But not all of it. The whole shop was permeated with the musty scent.

The *thing* changed! As I watched, there seemed to be, at one time, a globular piece of matter twisting on the rod. An instant later, the globe had turned into a triangle—then into something remotely resembling a cube. It was constantly in motion; constantly in flux. But here is the curious part. It did not change shape slowly, as an amoeba, so that you could watch the sphere turn into an oblong; the oblong writhe into a formless blob of flesh. It made these changes instantaneously!

Ki Patterson cried, "Good God, Burch! What unholy thing is this?" and took a step forward, past his brother's shoulder.

Burch shouted, "Back!" and yanked at Ki's arm. He moved just in time. For as Ki quitted the spot to which he had advanced, there appeared *in the air* right over that spot, another mass of the same black stuff that was captured on the bar. A blob of shapeless, stinking matter that gaped like some huge mouth; then closed convulsively just where Ki had stood a moment before!

And now the fragment on the rod was really moving! It changed shape so rapidly; twisted and wriggled with such determination, that there was no doubt whatsoever about the sentience governing it. And other similar blobs suddenly sprang into sight! A black pyramid struck the far wall of the shed, and trembling woodwork told that here was solid matter. An ebon sphere rose from nowhere to roll across the floor, stopping just short of us. Most weirdly of all, a shaft of black jolted down *through* the floor—and failed to break the flooring!

That's about all I remember of that visit. For Ki suddenly loosed a terrified yelp; turned and scrambled past me to the door. I take no medals for courage. He was four steps ahead of me at the portal, but I beat him to the house by a cool ten yards. Burch was the only calm one. He took time to lock the work-shed door; then followed us.

But don't let anyone tell you *he* was exactly calm, either. His face wasn't white, like Ki's. Nor did his hand shake on the whisky-and-splash glass, like mine. But there was real fear in his eyes. I mean, *real* fear!

The whisky was a big help. It brought my voice back. "Well, Burch," I said. "We've seen it. Now, what in hell did we see?"

"You have seen," said Burch Patterson soberly, "the thing that killed Toland, and Fletcher, and Gainelle."

CHAPTER III

Patterson's Story

"WE found it," said Burch, "on the Maratan Plateau. For we did get there, you know. Yes. Even though our radio went bad on us, just after we left Quiché, and we lost contact with the world. For a while, we considered going into Lima for repairs, but Fletcher thought he could fix it up once we were on solid ground, so we let it ride.

"We found a good, natural landing field on the Plateau, and began our investigations." He brooded silently for a minute. Then, reluctantly, "The Maratan is even richer in paleontological data than men have dared hope. But Man must never try to go there again. Not until his knowledge is greater than it is today."

Ki said, "Why? That *thing* outside?"

"Yes. It is the Gateway for that—and others like it.

"Some day I will tell you all about the marvels we saw on the Plateau. But now my story concerns only one; the one you have seen.

"Fletcher saw it first. We had left Gainelle tending camp, and were making a field survey, when we saw a bare patch in the jungle which surrounded our landing field. Fletcher trained his glasses on the spot, and before he even had time to adjust them properly he was crying, 'There's something funny over there! Take a look!'

"We all looked then. And we saw—what you saw a few minutes ago. Huge, amorphous blobs of jet black, which seemed to be of the earth, yet not quite of it. Sometimes these ever-changing fragments were suspended in air, with no visible support. At other times they seemed to rest naturally enough on solid ground. But ever and ever again—they changed!

"Afire with curiosity, we went to the open spot. It was a mistake."

"A mistake?" I said.

"Yes. Fletcher lost his life—killed by his own curiosity. I need not tell you how he died. It was, you must believe me, horrible. Out of nowhere, one of the jet blobs appeared before him . . . then around him . . . then—he was gone!"

"Gone!" exclaimed Ki. "You mean—dead?"

"I mean gone! One second he was there. The next, both he and the *thing* which had snatched him had disappeared into thin air.

"Toland and I fled, panic stricken, back to camp. We told Gainelle what we had seen. Gainelle, a crack shot and a gallant sportsman, was incredulous; perhaps even dubious. At his insistence, we armed and returned to the tiny glade.

"This time, it was as if the *thing* expected us—for it did not await our attack. It attacked us. We had barely entered its domain when suddenly, all about us, were clots of this ever-changing black. I remembered hearing Toland scream; high and thin, like a woman.

I dimly recall hearing the booming cough of Gainelle's express rifle, and of firing myself.

"I REMEMBER thinking, subconsciously, that Gainelle was a crack shot. That he never missed anything he aimed at. But it didn't seem to matter. If you hit one of those fleshy blobs, it bled a trifle—maybe. More likely than not, it changed shape. Or disappeared entirely.

"It was a rout. We left Toland behind us, dead, on the plain. A black, triangular *thing* had slashed Gainelle from breast to groin. I managed to drag him half way out of the glade before he died in my arms. Then I was alone.

"I am not a good pilot, under best conditions. Now I was frantic; crazed with fear. Somehow I managed to reach the 'plane. But in attempting to take off, I cracked up. I must bear a charmed life. I was not injured, myself, but the 'plane was ruined. My expedition, hardly started, was already at an end."

I was beginning to understand, now, why Burch Patterson had not wanted the world to know of his return. A tale as wild, and fantastic as this would lead him to but one spot—the psychopathic ward. Had I not seen the *thing* there in the shed, I would never have believed him myself. But as it was—

"And then?" I asked.

"I think there is a form of insanity," said Burch, "which is braver than bravery. I think that insanity came upon me then. All I could comprehend was that some *thing*; a *thing* that changed its shape; had killed my companions.

"I determined to capture that *thing*—or die in the attempt. But first I had to sit down and figure out what it *was*!"

Ki licked his lips. "And—and did you figure it out, Burch?"

"I think so. But the result of my reasoning is as fantastic as the *thing* itself. That is why I want the help and advice of you two. I will tell you what I think. Then you must say what it is best to do."

I poured another drink all around. It wasn't my house, or my liquor, but nobody seemed to mind. Ki and I waited for Burch to begin. Burch had picked up, and was now handling with a curiously abstract air, a clean, white sheet of notepaper. As he began, he waved this before us.

"Can you conceive," he said, "of a world of only two dimensions? A world which scientists might call 'Flatland'? A world constructed like this piece of paper—on which might live creatures who could not even visualize a third dimension of depth?"

"Sure," said Ki. I wasn't so sure, myself, but I said nothing.

"Very well. Look—" Burch busied himself with a pencil for an instant. "I draw on this sheet of paper, a tiny man. He is a Flatlander. He can move forward or backward. Up or down. But he can never move *out* of his world, into the third dimension, because he has no knowledge of a dimension angular to

that in which he lives. He does not even dream of its existence."

I said, "I see what you mean now. But what has that to do with—"

"Wait, Len." Patterson suddenly struck the paper a blow with one finger; piercing it. He held the sheet up for our inspection. "Look at this. What do you see?"

"A sheet of paper," I said, "with a hole in it."

"Yes. But what does the *Flatlander* see?"

Ki looked excited. "I get it, Burch! He sees an unexpected, solid object appear before him—out of nowhere! If he walks around this object, he discovers it to be crudely round!"

"Exactly. Now if I push the finger farther through the hole—"

"The object expands!"

"And if I bend it?"

"It changes its shape!"

"And if I thrust another finger through Flatland—"

"Another strangely shaped piece of solid matter materializes before the *Flatlander*!" Ki's eyes were widening by the moment. I didn't understand why.

I said, "I told you I didn't have a scientific mind, Burch. What does all this mean?"

Burch said patiently, "I have merely been establishing a thought-pattern, Len, so you can grasp the next step of my reasoning. Forget the *Flatlander* now—or, rather, try to think of *us* as being in his place!

"**WOULD** we not, to a creature whose natural habitat is a higher plane than ours, appear much the same sort of projection as the *Flatlander* is to us?"

"Suppose a creature of this higher plane projected a portion of himself into *our* dimension—as I projected my finger into Flatland. We would not be able to see *all* of him, just as the *Flatlander* could not see all of us. We would see only a tri-dimensional cross-section of him; as the *Flatlander* saw a bi-dimensional cross-section of us!"

This time I got it. I gasped.

"Then you think that *thing* in the work-shed is a cross-section of a creature from the—"

"Yes, Len. From the Fourth Dimension!"

Patterson smiled wanly.

"That is the decision I reached on the Maratan Plateau. There confronted me the problem of capturing the *thing*. The answer eluded me for weeks. Finally, I found it."

"It was—" Ki was leaning forward breathlessly.

"The *Flatlander*," said Burch, "could not capture my finger, *ever*, by lassoing it. No matter how tight he drew his noose, I could always withdraw my finger.

"But he *could* secure a portion of me, by fastening me to his dimension. Thus—" He showed us how a pin, laid flat in Flatland, could pierce a small piece of skin. "Now if this pin were bolted securely, the finger thus prisoned could not be withdrawn.

"That was the principle on which I worked, but my task had just begun. It took months to effect the cap-

ture. I had to study, from afar, the amorphous black *thing* which was my quarry. Try to form some concept of what incredible Fourth Dimensional beast would cast projections of that nature into the Third.

"Finally I decided that one certain piece of black matter, occurring in a certain relationship to the changing whole, was a foot. How, it is not important to tell. It was, after all, theory, coupled with guesswork."

"I constructed the shackle you have seen. Two uprights, with a third that must pierce the *thing*; then lock upon it. I waited, then, many weeks. Finally there came a chance to spring my trap. And—it worked!"

Ki said, "And then?"

"The rest is a long and tiresome story. Somehow I found my way to a native village; there employed natives to drag my captive from the Plateau. We were handicapped by the fact that we could never get too near the trap. You see, it is a *limb* we have imprisoned. The head, or eating apparatus, or what ever it is, is still free. That is what tried to reach you, Ki, there in the shed.

"Anyway, we made an arduous trek to the coast. As I have told you, I chartered a vessel. The sailors hated my cargo, and feared it. The trip was not an easy one. But I was determined, and my determination bore fruit. And—here we are."

I SAID, "Yeah—here we are. Just like the man who grabbed a tiger by the tail; then couldn't let go. Now that you've got this *thing*, what are you going to do with it?"

"That's what I want you to tell me."

Ki's eyes were glowing. He said, "Good Lord, man, is there any question in your mind? Call in the scientists—the whole damned brigade of them! Show them this thing! You've got the marvel of the age on your hands!"

"And you, Len?"

"You want it straight?" I said. "Or would you like to have me pull my punches?"

"Straight. That's why I asked you out here."

"Then get rid of it." I said. "Kill it. Set it on fire. Destroy it. I don't know just how you're going to do it, but I do know that's the thing to do.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking, Ki—so shut up! I'm a dope. Sure. I'm ignorant. Sure. I don't have the mind or the heart of a true scientist. Okay—you win! But Burch said I had common sense—and I'm exercising it now. I say—get rid of that damned thing before something happens. Something horrible that you will regret for the rest of your life!"

Ki looked a little peeved. He said, "You're nuts, Len! The thing's tied down, isn't it? Dammit, man—you're the kind of guy who holds back the progress of the world. I bet you'd have voted to kill Galileo if you'd been alive in his day."

"If he'd trapped a monster like this," I retorted, "A monster who'd already killed at least three men,

I'd have voted just that way. I'm not superstitious, Burch. But I'm afraid. I'm afraid that when Man starts monkeying with the Unknown, he gets beyond his depth. I say—kill it, now!"

Burch looked at me anxiously.

"That's your last word, Len?"

"Absolutely my last," I said. I rose. "And just to prove it, I'm going home now. And I'm not even going to write a damned word about what I've seen tonight. I don't care if this is the best story since the Deluge—I'm not going to write it!"

Ki said, "You give me a pain, Len. In the neck."

"Same to you," I told him, "only lower down. Well, so long, guys." And I went home.

CHAPTER IV

Terror

I KEPT my word. Though I had the mimsies all night, tossing and thinking about that crazy, changing black *thing*, I didn't put a word concerning it on paper. I half expected to hear from Burch Patterson some time during the next day. But I didn't. Then, the following morning, I saw why. The *Call* carried a front page blast, screaming to the astonished world the news that, "the missing explorer, Burch Patterson, has returned home," and that "tonight there will be a convocation of eminent scientists" at his home to view some marvel brought back from the wilds of upper Peru.

All of which meant that brother Ki's arguments had proven more persuasive than mine. And that tonight there was to be a preview of that damned *thing*.

I was pretty sore about it. I thought the least they could have done was give me the news beat on the yarn. But there wasn't any use crying over spilt milk. Anyway, I remembered that Ki's paper had a tie-up with the *Call*. It was natural he should route the story that way.

And then I went down to the office, and Joe Slade, the human buzz saw who calls himself our City Editor, waned me up to his desk.

"You, Harvey," he said, "I'm going to give you a chance to earn some of that forty per we're overpaying you. I want you to represent us tonight out at Patterson's home in Jersey. He's going to unveil something mysterious."

I said, "Who—me? Listen, chief, give it to Bill Reynolds, won't you? I've got some rewrites to do—"

"You, I said. What's the matter? Does New Jersey give you asthma?"

"Chief," I pleaded, "I can't cover this. I don't know anything about science or—"

"What do you mean—science?" He pushed back his eyeshade and glared at me. "Do you know what this is all about?"

That stopped me. I didn't want to go, but if I ever admitted that I'd known about Patterson's changeable what-is-it, and not beaten the *Call* to the

streets with the story, I would be scanning the want ads in fifteen seconds flat. So I gulped and said, "Okay, boss. I'll go."

EVERYBODY and his brother was there that night. I recognized a professor of Physics from Columbia U., and the Dean of Paleontology from N. Y. U. Two old graybeards from the Academy of Natural History were over in a corner discussing something that ended in—zoic, and the curator of the Museum was present, smelling as musty as one of his ancient mummies.

The Press was out in force. All the bureaus, and most of the New York papers. Ki was doing the receiving. Burch had not yet put in an appearance. I found a minute to get Ki aside, and told him what a skunky trick I thought he'd pulled on me, but he merely shrugged.

"I'm sorry, Len. But you had your chance. After all, I had to think of my own paper first." Then he smiled. "And beside, you were in favor of destroying the *thing*."

"I still am," I told him dourly.

"Then what are you here for?"

It was my turn to shrug. "It was either come or lose my job," I said. "What do you think?"

Then Burch put in an appearance, and the whole outfit went genteelly crazy. Flash bulbs started blazing, and all my learned *confrères* of the Third Estate started shooting questions at him. About his trip, the loss of his comrades, his experiences. I knew all that stuff, so I just waited for the big blow-off to follow.

It came, at last. The moment when Burch said:

"Before I tell my entire story, I prefer that you see that which I brought back with me," and he led the way out to the work-shed.

Ki and Burch had fixed up the place a little; put chalk lines on the floor to show the visitors where they might stand.

"And I warn you," Burch said, just before he opened the shed door, "Not to move beyond those lines. Afterward you will understand why."

Then the crowd began to file in. From my vantage point in the rear, I could tell when the first pair of eyes sighted that *thing*—and when every subsequent visitor saw it, as well. Gasps, exclamations, and little cries of astonishment rippled through the crowd as one by one they moved into the room.

The *thing* was still suspended on its imprisoning rod. As before, it was wriggling and moving; changing its shape with such rapidity that the human eye could scarcely view one shape before that turned into another. In view of what Burch had told me, I could comprehend the *thing* better now. I could understand how, if that black blob of flesh captured by the bar were *really*—as Burch presumed—a leg of some ultra-dimensional monster, the movements of that limb, as it sought to break free, would throw continually changing projections into our world.

I could understand, too, why from time to time we

would see *other* bits of solid matter appear in various sections of the room. Though these seemed disassociated with that chunk hanging on the trap, I knew it was really separate portions of the same beast. Because if a *man* were to thrust four fingers, simultaneously, into Flatland, to the Flatlander these would appear to be four separate objects; while in reality they were part of a single unit in a dimension beyond his powers of conception.

The astonishment of the professors was something to behold. I began to feel a little bit ashamed of myself, there in the background. Perhaps I had been wrong to give Burch the advice I had. Perhaps, as Ki had said, this was one of the greatest discoveries of all time. It belonged to the world of science?

One of the photographers was dropping to his knee; levelling his Graflex at the shifting, changing *thing* on the rod. I caught myself thinking, swiftly, "He shouldn't do that!" Evidently Burch had the same idea. He took a swift step forward; cried, "Please! If you don't mind—"

He spoke too late. The man's finger pressed. For an instant the room was flooded with light.

AND then it happened. I heard a sound like a thin, high bleating that seemed to come from far, far away. Or it may not have been a sound at all, in the true sense of that word. It may have been some tonic wave of supernal heights; for it tortured the eardrums to hear it.

The thing on the rod churned into motion. Violent motion. It grew and dwindled; shifted from cube to hemisphere; back to cube again. Then a truncated pyramidal form was throbbing, jerking, churning on the steel. Where I had once noticed an old, ugly, healed wound; ichor-clotted, now I saw ragged edges of black break open. Saw a few, fresh gouts of brownish fluid well from what seemed to be raw edges in that changing black.

Burch's horrified voice raised above the tumult.

"Get out! Get out—all of you! Before it—"

That was all he found time to say. For there came a horrible, sucking sound, like the sound of gangrenous flesh tearing away; and where there had been a changing black shape swirling on an imprisoning steel rod—now there was nothing!

But with equal suddenness, several of the shapeless blobs of matter from various parts of the room seemed to rush together with frightful speed. Someone, screaming with terror, bumped against me then. I fell to my hands and knees in the doorway; feeling the flood of human fear scramble over me.

But not until I had seen a scimitar-shaped blob of black flesh reach out to strike at Ki Patterson. Ki had not even time to cry out. He went down, dead, as though stricken by the sickle of Chronos.

I cried, "Burch!"

Burch had turned to face the coalescing monster. A revolver in his hand was filling the little room with thunder. Orange gouts of flame belched from its muz-

zle; and I knew he was not missing. Still the thing was closing in on him. I saw what appeared to be four jet circles appear in a ring over the head of Burch Patterson. Saw the circles expand; and a wider expanse of black—flat and sinister—appear directly over his head. They came together with a clutching, enveloping movement. Then—he was gone!

SOMEHOW I managed to struggle out of that work shed. Not that it made any difference. For with the disappearance of Burch Patterson, the *thing* itself disappeared.

I won't try to describe the frightened group of news men and scientists who gathered at the Patterson house. Who trembled and quaked, and offered fanatic reasons for that which had transpired. Who finally summoned up courage enough to return to the shed cautiously; seeking the mortal remains of Burch Patterson.

They never found anything, of course. Ki was there, but Ki was dead. Burch was gone. The air was still putrid with that unearthly animal stench. Beneath the steel "trap" Patterson had built for his *thing*, there was a pool of drying brownish fluid. One of the scientists wanted to take a sample of this for analysis. He returned to the house for a test-tube in which to put it . . .

Maybe it was the wrong thing for me to do. But I thought, then, that it was best. And I still think so. If he had taken that sample; made that analysis; sooner or later another expedition would have set out for the Maratan Plateau in search of that *thing* whose blood did not correspond to that of any known animal. I didn't believe this should happen. So, while he was gone, I set fire to the work shed. It was an old place; old and dry as tinder. By the time he had returned, it was a seething cauldron of flame. It made a fitting pyre for the body of Ki Patterson . . .

But—I don't know. I have wondered, since. Somehow, I have a feeling that Burch Patterson may not be dead, after all. That is—if a human can live in a dimension of which he cannot conceive.

The more I think of it; the more I try to reconcile that which I saw with that which Burch told me; the more I believe that the thing which descended upon Burch, there in the shed, was not a "mouth"—but a gigantic paw! You know, I saw four circles appear . . . with a flat black spot above. It could have been four huge fingers . . . with the palm descending to grasp the daring tri-dimensional "Flatlander" who had the audacity to match wits with a creature from a superior world. If that be so . . . and if the *thing* were intelligent . . . Patterson might still be alive . . .

I don't know. But sometimes I am tempted to organize another expedition to the Maratan Plateau, myself. Try to learn the truth concerning the *thing* from beyond the Gateway. The truth concerning Burch Patterson's fate.

What would you do?

Fantastic



The CARDIFF GIANT WAS DISCOVERED BY A GROUP OF WORKMEN, DIGGING A WELL ON THE NEWELL FARM, NEAR CARDIFF, N.Y. - THE DISCOVERY OCCASIONED GREAT EXCITEMENT BOTH AMONG COMMON PEOPLE AND SCIENTISTS TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE EXTREME INTEREST, NEWELL PLACED THE FIGURE ON EXHIBITION AND CHARGED A FEE TO SEE IT. THIS NETTED HIM A SMALL FORTUNE,

SCIENTISTS GATHERED TO SEE THE AMAZING FIND, AND SOME PRONOUNCED IT A PETRIFIED MAN OF GIANT SIZE, AND SOME DENOUNCED IT AS AN OUTRIGHT FRAUD, BUT RELIGIOUSLY INCLINED PEOPLE POINTED TO THEIR BIBLES AS EVIDENCE THAT THERE HAD BEEN GIANTS ON THE EARTH IN THE PAST. OTHERS CLAIMED IT TO BE NOTHING BUT A STATUE CARVED BY A LONG DEAD RACE.



WHEN PROFESSOR MARSH OF YALE, PROVED IT TO BE A FRAUD, NEWELL TOLD THE STORY, HE DESCRIBED HOW THE STATUE HAD BEEN CARVED IN CHICAGO, BY A PROFESSIONAL STONE-CUTTER. HE EXPLAINED HIS MOTIVE FOR THE HOAX AS A MEANS OF REVENGE ON ONE REVEREND TURK, WHO HAD DEFEATED HULL IN DEBATE ON WHETHER OR NOT THERE HAD EVER BEEN GIANTS.



NEWELL

WHO CONCEIVED THE IDEA OF THE CARDIFF GIANT HOAX.



Reverend
TURK

WHO FELL INTO THE TRAP AND ACCEPTED IT AS FACT.



GEORGE HULL

DEFEATED IN DEBATE, BUT TRIUMPHANT IN REVENGE.

hoaxes

By JULIUS SCHWARTZ

One of the most amazing hoaxes ever foisted upon the American public was the now famous "Cardiff Giant". It was perpetrated by a man named Newell and his brother-in-law, George Hull, late in 1869.

ILLUSTRATED BY JOE SEWELL

ON October 9, 1869, workmen digging a well on the Newell farm near Cardiff, New York, uncovered and removed a stone figure of gigantic dimensions. Upon cleaning off the clinging soil, the figure proved to be that of a nude man lying on his side and distorted as if he were in pain. The figure was emaciated as though the man had starved for a long while before his death.

News of the discovery spread rapidly and the populace of the surrounding country crowded the farm. Newell wisely had the figure removed to his house and by charging a fee to view the object, reaped a small fortune in the course of time.

The curiosity of the local population being satisfied, Newell took the "Cardiff Giant" as it was called, off on an exhibition tour. Scholars, scientists came to gape, to theorize, and to argue. And the more that came, the greater grew the wonder; and the greater the wonder, the more money Newell gathered. Distinguished paleontologists arrived to examine it and to form opinions and give out statements as to its origin. Some ventured to call it an outright fraud but the vociferations of these were unheard in the amazing controversy which followed.

A number of Bible enthusiasts proclaimed the statue to be a petrified man and stated that this proved the Bible's contention that a race of giants had existed some time in the past. This view was substantiated by certain of the paleontologists. Others, however, insisted that it was nothing but an ancient monumental statue, carved by a sculptor of some long-disappeared people. A feverish, intense search for other such statues produced no results. In any event, both groups were agreed as to the amazing antiquity of the statue.

The controversy was abruptly terminated when professor Marsh of Yale University exposed the fraud on scientific grounds, and then the secret was out. Newell told the complete story, glorying in the extent to which he and his brother-in-law, George Hull, who had conceived the idea for the hoax, had deceived scientists, clergymen, and laymen too, meanwhile using the publicity to line their pockets with money. A project begun as a joke became a very profitable venture for them.

The figure was roughly shaped in Iowa from a great block of gypsum. While en route to the railroad, the wagon broke down under the weight and a portion of the block had to be cut off to lighten the load. It arrived at Chicago where a professional stone carver finished the work. He was obliged to draw up the lower limbs as the block had been shortened, this resulting in an agonized posture. Then he proceeded to groove the figure to produce the appearance of emaciation and age. This was followed by staining which increased the illusion of great age. Lastly, the surface was pricked with tiny pores to give it the appearance of skin. In 1868 the figure was brought to the farm and buried for one year and then unearthed as related above.

Very cleverly, the sculptor had wrought the figure so as to leave it open to interpretation either as a petrified man or as an ancient statue. Precisely this double interpretation was made, the public, scientists, and even newspapers splitting into two camps neither of which took the trouble to ascertain the authenticity of the object over which they were debating so heatedly. And so for many weeks the argument raged. The public awed by the names of the scientists who became involved and by the opinions they formed, flocked to the exhibition rooms and made Newell and Hull rich merely for the privilege of staring at the lump of rock.

It became a subject for conversation and heated argument in almost every gathering, whether it were a meeting of scientists, or just a vociferous outburst on the part of two inebriates on the street, or in a tavern. Wider publicity was attained by the attempt on the part of newspapers to keep it headlined.

Many years later, Hull confessed that the real reason that he had the Giant constructed was not to reap the profit he did, but to avenge himself upon one Reverend Turk, who had defeated Hull in a debate wherein the latter had attempted to prove that the race of giants spoken of in the Bible was non-existent.

The Reverend Turk was one of the stoutest supporters of those who proclaimed the bogus giant to be a petrified man, and one can well imagine his chagrin when it was revealed that the giant was only a gigantic hoax!

Intrigue in LEMURIA

BY

FREDERICK
ARNOLD KUMMER, JR.

PROLOGUE

Kirk, the Wanderer, journeys into Lemuria, and comes afoul of an ugly plot against the fair queen of Kef

"GUNS!" snorted Kirk Patterson. "Why, man, I'll take my old battle axe anytime. Those ancient warriors with their so-called crude weapons would take the modern soldier for a ride. Take Heklos, here, my pet Cretan axe. . . ." He picked up a heavy, gleaming double-bladed bronze weapon and swung it around his head with a vicious whistle.

"Look out!" protested Brad Burney in dismay, retreating from the menace of the glittering halo Kirk made of the axe. "You'll cut somebody's head off!"

Kirk grinned and glanced around the store room of the New York Anthropological Institute. "Don't think it wouldn't be a cinch," he boasted. "Take that block of wood over there, the one we use for chipping stone . . . just watch what Heklos does to it!"

He swung the glittering axe around his head once, then it zipped across the intervening fifty feet of distance like a streak of lightning. There was a dull, heavy thud, a splitting sound, and the two halves of the heavy block fell in opposite directions. The axe itself smacked solidly into the wall, burying its blade three inches into the heavy planking.

"Holy Cow!" exclaimed Burney. "What are you, a human cannon!"

Kirk smiled, flexing his brawny arms with the joy of one who delights in his own physical prowess. "I didn't set the shot-put record in college without good reason," he explained modestly. "I've got the same sort of muscles those old boys had in the days when weapons like Heklos were the most important part of any fight or battle."

Burney emerged from the corner of the room and ran his finger around the inside of his shirt collar. "You've got me convinced," he admitted. "But do you mean to tell me all that stuff about you being called Kirk, The Wanderer, is true? Do you actually bat off to some far corner of the earth for six months at a time, taking that axe with you? Hell, man, where do you go? Africa? South American jungles?"

Kirk seated himself on a large packing case and looked quizzically at Burney.

"Sure," he said calmly. "That's the nickname the

Lashing tentacles leaped out and wound around Kirk's body. With his axe he slashed at them desperately to free himself of the deadly coils





Institute has hung on me, and it just about describes me. I'm the Wanderer, all right, but in a broader sense than that. Did you ever hear of Lemuria?"

"Lemur . . ." Burney snorted. "Don't hand me that stuff. I've heard enough fairy tales today. 'Lemuria sank into the sea thousands of years ago.'"

Kirk stared at Burney levelly, his face serious and thoughtful. "Thousands of years ago? Brad, what is time, anyway? Do you know?"

"Time? Sure. It's hours, minutes. When it's twelve o'clock, it's time to eat . . . say, what are you driving at?" Burney looked at Kirk suspiciously.

Kirk paid no attention, but went on dreamily. "And space, what is that? Do you really know? There's a lot of space on this globe, where no modern man has ever been; no exploration record of millions of square miles of territory. Maybe it's because there are a couple of dimensions, real or not, as you prefer, that a person blunders into only once in a while, or there's just a certain spot where the barrier can be crossed—if you *know* where it is."

"You mean . . . ?" began Burney incredulously.

Kirk Patterson stood erect suddenly, and on his face shone a strange expression of anticipation.

"Yes," he said exultantly. "I know a lot about the earth that isn't generally known. I'm not called Kirk, The Wanderer, without reason. I've wandered in places no modern man other than myself has ever been. It's earth, all right. There are real roads leading to all those places, and I know those roads. Nothing supernatural about it at all. And you'll just have to take my word for it when I say that tomorrow—tonight, I'm leaving for Lemuria—a Lemuria just as ancient and real as the one that was *supposed* to have vanished beneath the waves. *There* is a place where Heklos and I can enjoy ourselves; where a man with a puny pop-gun wouldn't stand a chance!" He uttered a few words in a strange language.

For a long moment Brad Burney looked at the face of Kirk Patterson—Kirk, The Wanderer—then a look of belief crept into his puzzled eyes. "Damned if I don't believe you," he said. "You go *somewhere*, that's a cinch, and nobody's ever called you a liar, so far as I know, so why should I start now?"

Kirk looked at the smaller man. "Thanks," he said sincerely. "Maybe I'll take you along someday."

Burney glanced at the bronze axe in the wall and then at the two halves of the wood block. "No," he swallowed hastily. "I don't think I want to go—not where they sling razor-bladed dynamite around like that just for pastime. I'll take my chances with the pop-guns. They *do* seem a lot safer!"

CHAPTER I

A Vision in a Wine Goblet

THE common room of the tavern was damp, chilly, in spite of the roaring fire on its stone-flagged hearth. A wind-swept rain from the

sea had changed Thantis, normally a welcome haven for storm-tossed mariners, into a grey and barren mass of stone. Kirk, glancing through the half-open door of the inn, frowned. The harbor, with its fringe of stately marble buildings, its massive stone quays, its rows of moored galleys, was desolate when seen through the silver slants of rain. A far cry from everyday New York, and the staid mustiness of the Anthropological Institute he'd left far behind two months ago.

The American shook his head, resumed his polishing of the great bronze axe and shield that lay upon the table before him. Three days the storm had kept him a restless prisoner in Thantis, waiting a change of wind that would enable him to take ship, skirt the southern shores of this hidden land of Lemuria in his journey to the eastward. Three days, and the wanderlust was beginning to rebel against the delay.

Of the others who crowded the inn, they were for the most part storm-bound seamen, wiry brown little mariners of Mu, seeking diversion in wine, dice, and the lithe dancing girls who swayed to the music of lutes and pipes.

Two men, seated at a table in a far corner, were, however, of a different stripe from the roistering sailors. One of them, a lean, parchment-skinned individual, swathed in a dark cloak, seemed a priest or mystic; the other, black-bearded, swarthy, was, to judge from his jade-encrusted armor, his plumed helmet, a noble. Bent low over their table, whispering, they glanced from time to time at Kirk, as though marveling at the American's fair skin and blue eyes, his yellow hair and six-foot muscular frame. At length, nodding, they arose, approached his table.

"Hail, stranger!" The black-bearded noble grinned, seated himself upon the bench. "What land breeds such mighty warriors as you?"

"Kirk the Wanderer I am called." He swung the bronze shield into place on his back, fastened the double-headed axe to his belt. "From America, a land very far away. And you?"

"Men of Thantis. I, Gurno, captain of the royal guard. And" . . . he motioned to his cadaverous companion . . . "Saban, high priest to our gracious ruler, Vanil, king of all Kef."

Saban the priest nodded, a withered smile clinging to his pale lips.

"You have come far, stranger," he murmured. "Do you find the wine and women of Thantis as pleasing as those of your strange land?"

"Much the same in all lands," Kirk grunted. "Already they have palled upon me. The horizon calls and I would be free of stinking city street."

"Perhaps" . . . Saban's eyes were slivers of dark obsidian . . . "you have not known the right wine . . . or the right woman." He beckoned to the obese host. "A flagon of your finest Cyrian, rogue!"

Bowing, the tavernkeeper waddled off, returned with pitcher and goblets. Deftly Saban filled the cups, but when Kirk would have drunk, stayed his hand.

"Wine and women are kindred evils," he whispered. "Gaze into your goblet!"

Kirk stared down at the purple shimmering wine but could see nothing. Then, like a rustle of old silk, the priest's voice sounded in a soft chant.

"Fair is she to gaze upon, for her hair is coiled darkness, and her eyes like stars on a summer's night. Smooth is her skin as polished ivory and the redness of pomegranates stains her lips. See, they move! Favored of the gods are those upon whom she smiles!"

Kirk drew a sharp breath. In the purple depths a face was taking shape, the face of a girl lovely beyond all imagining. Young, she seemed, fresh as morning dew and as pure. For a long moment Kirk watched the vision grow, throw off the dim mists that veiled it, become clear, distinct.

Then, suddenly, warned by some inward instinct, the American sought to move, but his head seemed held by a vise. Saban's voice droned on, insistent, slow, and unvarying as the beat of a heart. The noise of the tavern had dwindled away into the distance and Kirk felt that he was somehow leaving the lands of man, entering the mysterious purple world in which the dark-haired girl stood, smiling.

Now the tavern was a vague, far-off memory, and Kirk was in the misty purple void, facing the dark, ivory-skinned lady. Saban's voice had changed to monotonous, primitive music, an atavistic chant thudding, thudding against his brain, driving him ever deeper into the mauve, opaque cloud. The girl was close to him now, smiling as she advanced through the shimmering mists. Sight of her slim body, her scarlet lips, her opal eyes, set Kirk's brain on fire.

Hungrily he reached for her . . . and as he did so, the rhythmic music changed its cadence. Soft, soothing, drowsy it became, and Kirk felt a darkness, as black as the girl's perfumed hair, steal through his brain. Sleep . . . the music willed that he sleep. . . . The girl, the purple world, were still there, and there was promise in the lulling chant that he would see them again after he slumbered. Kirk nodded, yielded to the cloudy fog of oblivion that was overpowering him. One last glimpse of the dark lady, a dim, vague vision, and he knew nothing more.

A SMELL of perfume, heavy lotus-scent, filtered in upon Kirk's consciousness, arousing him. Bewildered, he drew himself into a sitting position, glanced about. He was in a small chamber, unlit save for pallid moonlight streaming through a latticed window; the couch upon which he rested was soft, all silk and lace. At one end of the room he could see a curtained doorway.

Kirk shook his head, wondering. Moonlight. It had been grey afternoon long eons ago in the tavern. What place was this? And what lay beyond those rich velvet hangings? All at once he became aware of lotus blossoms entwined in his long yellow hair, garlands of hibiscus about his neck. Lover's garland. . . .

Memory of the dark girl brought blood, throbbing,

to his face. Was this part of the misty purple world of fantasy, or was it some dwelling in the pale city of Thantis? Was the dark girl real, tangible, or had she been merely an illusion?

A glint of bronze caught the American's eye. His shield and axe, lying beside the couch. Gripping them, he rose to his feet, pushed aside the velvet hangings.

The room in which he now found himself was large, sumptuously furnished. The moon's rays gave a soft sheen to silken draperies, winked on burnished lamps, vials, mirrors. It was not the rich carpets, the golden ornaments, however, that caught Kirk's eye. It was the girl. Upon a bed of purple silk, she lay, her dark hair flowing in rivulets across the pillows, her scarlet lips half-parted in sleep. Kirk drew a sharp breath. The girl whose face he had seen in the misty dream world! Was this also a vision, a dream? Or had he in some intangible way entered the purple land of the wine?

For a long moment he stared, dazzled by her exquisite beauty, then crossing the room, shook her gently. With a start the girl awoke, gazed up at him, gasping in wide-eyed terror.

"Who are you?" Kirk demanded. "And what place is this? Nay, have no fear. I . . ."

"Gods of Kef!" the girl whispered, her voice deep with fear. "You . . . You . . . I . . ." Springing swiftly from the silken couch, she reached for a tasseled bell-rope upon the wall.

"Stay!" Kirk seized her slender arm. "First tell me . . ."

He got no further. A thudding of feet, a clatter of arms sounded in the corridor outside and the black-bearded Gurno, followed by a dozen guards and torch-bearers, burst into the room.

"Your majesty!" Gurno exclaimed. "I thought I heard . . ." He broke off at sight of Kirk, gripping the girl in what appeared to be an embrace. "A thousand pardons, my lady. I did not know that you . . . entertained."

CHEEKS flaming, the girl broke from Kirk's grasp, faced the captain of the guard.

"You dare?" she whispered. "You dare suggest . . .?"

"Me?" Gurno laughed. "I suggest nothing. It is for the king to decide." He turned to one of the guardsmen. "His majesty is with Saban. Fetch him here at once!"

Kirk stared in perplexity at the scene before him, gripped his axe, dazed. Gurno, the rogue of the tavern! And this girl . . . the queen of Kef! Why had Gurno and the necromancer Saban brought him here, to the royal palace at Thantis? He glanced at the girl, an erect though diminutive figure in her sheer night-dress. Into what tortuous plot had he been dragged?

Crisp footsteps sounded in the hallway. Saban, the hawk-faced priest, accompanied by a slim youth in gold-worked robes, entered the room.

"Zora!" the young king whispered. "You . . .! Who

is this white-skinned barbarian?"

"The man is a stranger," she replied evenly. "I know not how he came here. Gurno would have you believe . . ."

"Observe the garlands about the knave's neck!" Saban pointed, and with a sweep of his sable robes, laughed dryly. "Observe also that he could not have entered the palace unnoticed without aid from one in authority. I warned you, majesty, against this woman's wiles!"

"Aye," Gurno murmured. "They were in a tender embrace when I entered. She makes a fool of you, excellency!"

"By Jupiter!" Kirk roared. "They lie! It was they who drugged me, brought me here!" Axe in hand he plunged toward Gurno, only to find his path barred by a dozen of the swarthy, gold-helmeted guardsmen.

Vanil, young ruler of Kef, squared his shoulders, shot an anguished look at his bride.

"You were right, Saban," he said dully. "Gods! To think I trusted such a woman, loved her! Let them both die in the pit!" Very bitterly he turned on his heel, walked away, heedless of the girl's pleadings.

When Vanil had left the bedchamber, Gurno waved his men forward.

"Seize them!" he commanded, his face satanic in the lurid light of the torches.

Kirk saw Zora's slim body tense as the purple-clad guards advanced toward her, but her chin remained proudly high. She had spirit, this queen of Kef. A glad light of battle lit up the American's blue eyes; he sprang forward, laughing in berserk joy.

The guards, expecting no resistance to their overwhelming numbers, fell back in amazement, drawing their curiously twisted swords from golden scabbards. Two crashing blows of the massive bronze axe, and two of their number lay sprawled upon the marble floor, heads cloven in twain.

"At him!" Gurno roared. "Will you let one stranger put you to flight?"

An angry shout arose from the remaining guardsmen. Their swords glittering in the red glare of the torches, they swept to the attack.

"Come, Murian dogs!" Kirk laughed. "Heklos, my axe, is parched for blood!"

CHAPTER II

Into the Pit of the Beast

A DOZEN blades licked out in silent answer, but the heavy bronze shield with its snarling lion's head in the center, kept the American from harm. Again he swung the axe and a brown muscular arm, lopped off at the shoulder, fell to the floor. The marble was slippery with blood, now, an unsteady footing for Kirk's worn sandals. Cautiously he retreated, keeping the girl-queen always behind him.

"Back!" he shouted to her. "Stay close to me!"

Silently she nodded, obeyed. The room was hide-

ous with noise, the clash of weapons, the shouts of the purple-clad warriors, as Kirk swung his axe in a glittering circle of death. Several of the gold-helmeted guardsmen had fallen back, wounded, but others pressed forward to take their places. The American was panting, face damp with sweat, his knotted muscles beginning to ache. Madness, to try and defeat an entire regiment of the palace guard. Yet if he could cut his way through to Gurno, force him to call them off . . .

In a burst of savage fury Kirk renewed the attack. A twisted sword lashed out, made a bloody furrow across the American's thigh, but its owner paid for the stroke with his life. Through gleaming armor, through bone itself, the axe crunched, laying bare the guardsman's chest. Again and again, it fell, battering down shields, shattering swords, cleaving a deadly path through the press of Murian warriors. Breath coming in gasps, teeth bared in a reckless grin, the big anthropologist hacked his way toward Gurno.

"By Tana!" the swarthy captain roared, watching his men fall back before this berserk assault. "Cowardly dogs! Weaklings!" And drawing his own sword, he aimed a murderous blow at Kirk's legs.

"Bad, blackbeard!" Kirk gasped. "A clumsy stroke!" Laughing, he swept the great bronze axe downward, struck the sword from Gurno's numbed fingers. Swiftly Kirk raised the battle axe once more, poised it above the captain's head.

"Give up!" Kirk's voice rolled like triumphant thunder through the bedchamber. "Call off your wolves, traitor, or I split your ugly head!"

Gurno hesitated, his coarse features pale in the flickering light of the cressets, his black eyes narrow, calculating.

"Quick!" Kirk growled. "Before I . . ."

A scream of warning from Zora checked him. Quickly he whirled about, but it was too late. A sword, hurled by one of the guardsmen was spinning through the air toward him. Hilt-first it struck, the gold-embossed handle crashing against his temple. Stunned, Kirk slumped to his knees, helpless, as a dozen of the little brown men seized him.

"Ah!" Gurno swaggered to the fore, laughing scornfully. "Captured, then, for all his boasting! We'll see how this outlander enjoys the pit, the Beasts that Crawl! Come!"

DAZED, Kirk made no resistance as they dragged him from the room. The great bronze axe still hung by its leather thong from his wrist, the shield remained on his arm, but secure in the grip of a dozen of the purple-clad guardsmen, he was powerless to move. Ahead of him he could see Zora's slim form, between two of the warriors; proudly beautiful she was, her skin gleaming like pale gold beneath her silken nightdress. At sight of her Kirk tried to break free, but a hail of savage blows subdued him.

Downward they went, through long dim corridors, through high-ceilinged marble halls, sumptuously

decked, their walls aglow with brightly-colored frescoes. Weird bas-reliefs, strange figures half-obliterated by age, marched in never ending processions along the passageways, peering with blind evil eyes from the dark stone. The guttering smoky torches cast huge grotesque shadows until it seemed that the place was some fantastic place of death, peopled by grey shades, tortured spirits of eld.

Downward, ever downward, into the very bowels of the earth. Rude steps hacked from the living rock, rough-hewn walls of black basalt, beaded with moisture and slime. Suddenly Gurno, in the lead, pushed open a heavy barred door, and Kirk saw a shudder shake Zora's slender shoulders. In the macabre darkness, racks, thumbscrews, massive instruments of torture, loomed ominously. Past these Gurno led the way, toward a round grating crisscrossed with copper bars. Kirk shook back his hair, glanced at the grill. What had they said about the "Pit," the "Beasts that Crawl!"?

Gurno drew open the grating. A dim lapping of waves issued from the stygian blackness below.

"The girl first," he snapped, motioning toward the dark circle.

"No! No!" Zora's composure broke; she struggled vainly against the stolid Murian warriors as they dragged her toward the opening. Very calmly they lifted her, thrust her into the opening. One shrill scream, trailing off into the distance and she was gone.

"Now the outlander," Gurno grinned satanically, gripping his belt.

Kirk remained motionless as they lifted his muscular body. Still dazed from the blow on his head, he made no attempt to struggle free as they thrust him, feet first, into the opening.

"A pleasant journey!" he heard Gurno laugh mockingly, and then he was falling, sliding down an inclined tunnel toward he knew not what. Panic, fear of the unknown, gripped Kirk. Frantically he tried to stop himself, but to no avail. The walls of the slanting gallery were polished, glass-smooth obsidian, damp with slime. Wind screamed past his ears and then with a blinding crash the world dissolved into dancing lights.

THE chill of water, as cold as the Atlantic in January, drove the shadows from Kirk's brain. Gasping, he floundered about, weighed down by his shield and ax, strove to pierce the crowding gloom.

"Here! This way!" Zora's voice, echoing strangely in the great cavern.

Desperately Kirk struck out toward her. As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he could see her frail white figure, crouched upon a narrow rocky ledge before the gaping mouth of the inclined tunnel. Knotting his powerful muscles, he drew himself up beside her.

"You . . . you're all right?" the girl whispered. "You struck your head on this ledge and I thought. . ."

"No!" Kirk grunted. "We of America are blessed with thick skulls. And cold water brings back life." He glanced about at the great underground lake, black and oily in the feeble, phosphorescent light that issued from the tunnel's mouth. "What hell-hole is this?"

"The pit of the sunken sea," Zora whispered. "A place of horror and death." She paused, shuddering.

"There is no way of escape?" Kirk demanded.

"None." The girl shook a hopeless head. "Only the tunnel leads here and that. . ."

The American turned, crawled into the sharply-slanted gallery. Glass-like, slimy, the polished obsidian defied his efforts to gain a foothold. After several futile attempts to ascend the steep passage, he rejoined the girl on the narrow ledge.

"No escape there," he muttered. "Even a blade as sharp as Heklos" . . . he touched the axe . . . "could not cut steps in that flinty stone. What of this dark lake? Are there no other shores to which we might swim?"

"Swim?" Zora breathed. "Gods of Kef! In that water lie the Things that Crawl!"

"Eh?" Kirk stared at the dark surface of the subterranean lake. "What are these creatures that cause such fear?"

"Devils with the strength of twenty men!" The girl's tones were thick with terror. "A dozen arms and a thirst for blood! Monsters, hideous, pitiless! Venture not again into the water, for your life's sake!"

"Holy Mackerel!" Kirk leaned upon the haft of his axe, gazing down at her. "What a crazy business this has been! I, fool enough to gaze into a shimmering wine cup, fall under the spells of those dogs Saban and Gurno! Yes, and awake to find myself in your bedchamber! Now. . ."

"What!" The girl gripped his arm, her dark eyes flashing. "Saban! Gurno! Now, do I see it clearly! They who fought Vanil's marriage to me, hoping he might wed Latu, Saban's evil sister, and thus give them control of the kingdom! And their plot to disgrace me, bring about my death so that Latu might still marry Vanil, become queen of all Kef! I. . ." The girl's voice trailed off into terrified silence. She swayed weakly against Kirk, gaze fixed on the swirling waters.

KIRK followed her glance, felt the hair at the back of his neck stiffen. Something, something huge, fantastic, was writhing upward through the black depths. Green glowing eyes, cold and unblinking, were fixed on the shelf where they stood, and a cruel curved beak was visible above loose, sucker-like lips. Long, snaky tentacles protruded from the foam.

"Holy Smoke!" Kirk muttered. "That's got Coney Island's House of Horrors beat. . ."

An agonized scream of terror from Zora interrupted him. One of the tentacles, lashing upwards, fastened about the girl's ankle, was drawing her toward the edge. A stroke of the American axe severed the monster's arm, and a bubbling scream broke from

its flaccid lips.

Gasping, the girl fell back upon the ledge, but before Kirk could raise the axe once more, the huge monster dragged its bulk over the shelf of rock, gripped Kirk with three huge tentacles.

In vain the American tried to break free, to swing his axe at the fierce hungry face. Strength, the strength of a python, lay in each of the twining arms, pinioning Kirk's hands to his sides. Cup-like suckers prevented him from slipping from the terrible embrace and the beast inched nearer to bring its taloned beak into play.

Beads of sweat stood out upon Kirk's face, and his muscles cracked under the awful pressure. In another moment, it seemed, his chest must cave in, his ribs snap. Inexorably the beast drew him closer; the sharp beak was poised to plunge into the American's body, the drooling mouth worked avidly, vampire-like, in anticipation of blood.

A moan of fright from Zora spurred Kirk to new efforts. Blindly all but unconscious, he kicked out with his free foot, driving the point of his heavy sandal into one of those cold, merciless eyes!

A coughing, screaming sound broke from the monster's lips; it writhed in pain, momentarily relaxing its grip. In that instant the American acted. One burst of strength, one might effort, and his arm was free. Two slashing strokes of the axe, and two of the tentacles, shorn through, fell away. Kirk's body was smeared with dark, viscid blood, now, but released from the crushing grip, new life seemed to enter his aching frame.

Again the axe whistled downward and the third tentacle was cut loose; even though severed from the parent body it writhed like a giant snake.

"Holy Mackerel!" Kirk stared in amazement as the bleeding truncated mass of flesh wriggled toward him, flailing the air with its remaining tentacles. "Are these things impossible to kill?"

Springing forward, he brought the axe down with all his strength its keen edge biting into the pulpy, formless head. Again that hissing, bubbling scream of pain, and the great bloated mass toppled from the ledge into the dark water below.

"So," Kirk panted. "You . . . you aren't hurt, girl?"

"No," she whispered. "I . . . I am . . . Gods! Look!"

CHAPTER III

Back from the Dead

KIRK peered over the ledge. Where the sea-beast had fallen, the lake was alive with squirming, lashing tentacles, with green luminous eyes. Other giant octopi, attracted by the blood, were feeding upon their dead comrade!

"You see?" Zora cried. "No hope! When they finish there . . . You could not expect to overcome a hundred of them. Yours has been a brave fight,

American, but the gods will that we die!"

For a long moment Kirk stared at the swirling, monstrous mass. Already some of the creatures were heading for the shelf, groping for a foothold on the rock. And the tunnel behind them too slippery to climb!

Suddenly Kirk's eyes fell upon the long, bloody tentacle lying upon the ledge at his feet. It was studded with round, hollowed suckers, natural suction cups.

"Zora!" he cried. "There is a way! Look!"

Swiftly he chopped the severed tentacle into foot-long lengths and with his axe-handle pushed loose the mass of flesh and muscle within the band of rubbery skin.

"Here!" He handed four of the gory objects to Zora. "With these on your hands and feet, you may be able to climb the passage!"

The girl hesitated, staring at the bands of hide in revulsion. Then as the sound of crawling bodies arose from the foot of the ledge, she thrust hands and feet into the bloody pieces of skin, turned to the tunnel.

Anxiously Kirk watched as Zora attempted the ascent. Hands and feet pressed against the slimy walls of the circular passage she commenced to inch her way upwards. Suddenly an exclamation of joy broke from the girl's lips. The cup-shaped suckers, clinging with vacuum force to the glassy obsidian, were enabling her to move slowly upwards!

"It . . . it works!" she called. "Come on! Hurry!"

With frenzied haste Kirk cut four more lengths from the dismembered tentacle, hollowed them. Hardly had he done so when a writhing snake-like arm thrashed up toward him! One swift blow lopped it off, then, the shield between his shoulders, the axe dangling from his wrist, Kirk dove into the mouth of the tunnel.

The ascent was difficult for the American, his brawny frame twice the weight of Zora's, but by pressing the cup-studded pieces of hide against the smooth stone he got a moment's grip before the vacuum broke. Fatal to stop, even for a moment; the grip must be constantly renewed with great pressure in order to hold him up.

Kirk had climbed only some six feet before he heard the monster behind him. Too large to squeeze into the narrow tunnel, it was reaching upward with groping arms. He felt a clammy tentacle brush his ankle, and redoubled his efforts. No room to turn, to strike, in these cramped quarters. Gasping, he dragged himself forward. A sound of furious thrashing, strange, croaking cries of rage echoed along the rocky shaft.

THE raging of the beast was growing fainter with each moment, however. Ahead Kirk could make out Zora's little form, hear her panting as she mounted the sharp incline. The tunnel down which they had slid so swiftly now seemed endless. Several times Kirk felt the suction grip break loose, saved himself

by slapping his hands and feet quickly against the walls to renew the vacuum. Once, too, Zora slipped, fell against him and it seemed that both must plunge into the grip of the crawling monsters again. Kirk, pressing with all his might against the tunnel walls, managed to keep his position until the girl recovered, commenced the climb once more.

At length, after what seemed hours of toil, they reached the few square feet of level floor at the top of the long incline. Holding firmly onto the copper grating, Kirk peered into the gloomy torture chamber beyond.

"Made it!" he exulted. "And no one here to interfere! Little room to swing an axe, yet I think . . . Move over there, out of the way!"

Zora obeyed, huddling against the damp wall as Kirk knelt before the copper-barred doorway, axe in hand. Muscles rippling in a flow of power, he drew back the weapon, swung forward. A loud clash of metal echoed through the dungeon beyond as bronze met copper. Again Kirk swung, and again the keen axe bit into the softer metal. At the third stroke one of the bars gave away, then another, leaving a narrow jagged opening.

"Quickly!" he muttered to the girl. "Out with you! Before those little brown devils are drawn by the sound of my axe!"

Nodding, Zora squeezed through the opening, dropped lightly to the floor. A harder job for the big American; when he at last gained the torture chamber his shirt was in ribbons, his body furrowed by the jagged shards of copper.

"So!" He grinned crookedly. "What now, Queen of Kef?"

Zora stood motionless a moment, deep in thought. Suddenly she nodded, as though making a decision.

"Gurno will likely be surrounded by his guardsmen," she whispered. "But Saban the necromancer keeps lonely quarters in his tower. If we could reach it, force him to confess . . . ! Come!"

Across the torture chamber, into the passageway, she led Kirk, upward through vast shadowy rooms, through dim, columned halls, along winding, rough-hewn stairways. Lost in this maze of dark galleries and corridors, the American marveled at Zora's ability to find her way.

Dark, at this late hour, the great palace. Now and again the clink of arms, the ruddy glow of torches sent the two fugitives to the shadow of some distant corner, to concealment behind golden tapestries, where they crouched, breathless, until the patrol of purple-cloaked guardsmen had passed. From room to room they passed, soft-footed phantoms of the night, Zora, a small weary figure in tattered rags. Kirk, huge-menacing, blood-smeared axe in hand. Gliding past an occasional cresset, their shadows sprawled vast, ominous, fantastic on the dark marble walls.

ALL at once the girl paused, gripped Kirk's arm. Weird, flickering lights gleamed ahead and a

sound of unearthly music drifted along the corridor. Before a large, black-curtained door, a gold-helmeted guard paced back and forth.

"Wait here," Kirk whispered, plunging into the shadows.

Hands pressed to her breasts, heart beating tumultuously, the girl watched. The powerful figure of the American inched closer, the sentinel, occupied with his own thoughts, paced mechanically back and forth. Now the fair-haired giant crouched, poised to spring . . .

Like a striking panther Kirk hurtled forward, his muscular fingers locking about the Murian's neck in an inexorable grip. Vainly the warrior tried to draw his sword, to cry out. His strength was no match for the American's, and only a feeble moan passed his lips. For merely a moment he struggled, then went limp, choked into insensibility. Very gently Kirk lowered his inert form to the floor, motioned to the girl to join him.

Feet pattering softly on the stone flags, she ran toward him, pointed silently at the curtained doorway. Kirk nodded, followed her as she slipped between the heavy tapestries.

Peering into the murky darkness, Kirk's form stiffened, and he choked back a startled gasp. Cloaked in the shadows of the entrance, he and Zora gazed in breathless wonder at the scene before them.

Black, black as the stygian pits of hell, was the immense room, walls, floor, massive columns, all hewn from sable basalt. Of light there was only that from two golden braziers . . . braziers wrought in the form of coiled serpents from whose gaping mouths eerie blue flame flickered. Threads of grey aromatic smoke swirled upwards to the dim reaches of the ceiling, and the weird mephitic glow revealed hideous, inhuman statues, revolting, ghastly murals that seemed to writhe in evil life as the flames danced and shuddered.

As evil as the frescoes that decked his temple was Saban, crouching between the two golden serpents. Parchment-yellow skin drawn tightly over his death's head of a face, black eyes glittering with a wild supernatural light, he seemed a ghoul from hell.

Opposite the priest stood Vanil, the young ruler of Kef, pale, distraught; he was attended only by the bearded, bull-necked Gurno, a squat gnome among the leaping shadows.

"Let it be so," Vanil was saying. "Now, Zora" . . . he winced at mention of the name . . . "has paid for her faithlessness, the people will clamor for a queen to carry on the line. Call up your familiars, Saban, and bid them speak!"

A thin smile of triumph flickered over Gurno's face, but the vulpine Saban remained emotionless. Arising, he threw a handful of powder upon the flames and the gray pungent smoke increased, giving a misty unreality to the scene. A lean, sepulchral figure in his ebony robes, Saban raised one arm in a gesture of command.

AT once a rushing sound of music filled the hall, strange, unworldly music, now thin like the scream of tortured souls, now deep; solemn as the tolling of distant bells. Wailing pipes, silver threads of melody, wrought upon the purple overtones of throbbing lutes, of singing lyres. Inexorable, maddening, the music pounded like a frenzied heart, plucked with cruel fingers upon the listeners' nerves. A chant from beyond the infinite, it seemed, a knell of doom echoing from the vague emptiness of the time-less void that men call death.

Then suddenly Saban was speaking, his voice high-pitched, quavering.

"Spirits of the dead!" he moaned. "Souls in infinity! Ancient rulers of Kef! From the lonely solitude of the gray mists, I summon you, from the howling, wind-swept reaches of eternal space! By mighty Tana, in the name of the Three Unholy Beasts of Harkan, before all the powers of earth and sea and sky, I command you! Come!"

A gust of cold air seemed to sweep the room, chilling the souls of Saban's listeners. The gray smoke writhed as in pain, and the blue light in the braziers died to a feeble glow. All at once Saban reached beneath his sable robe, drew forth a hideous, wizened teraph, the mummified head of a child.

"Long dead kings of Kef!" he cried. "With these lips, silent for a hundred years, speak! Make your presence known! I command you! Speak!"

For a long moment there was silence, deep, tense. Then, with horrible deliberation, the withered lips of the teraph moved! Zora shuddered. A deep rolling voice was issuing from the mummy's leathery mouth!

"Hafar, founder of Kef, speaks!" it said. "Why do ye disturb my rest?"

And Saban answered, "We call upon your council, shade, to determine who among all women shall be queen of Kef! Speak, ye dead, I conjure you! Arise, spirits . . .!"

He broke off, his voice trailing into a panicky whisper. The teraph fell from his outstretched hands, rolled across the floor. Two dim shapes, one huge, menacing, the other dainty, pallidly beautiful, were advancing through the shadows toward him.

"YOU call upon the dead?" Kirk's voice was mocking. "Here then are two but lately departed come to answer you."

"No!" Saban croaked, groveling, his face livid. "No! In the name of the gods of Kef . . ."

"Bah!" Kirk spurned the mummified teraph with his foot, exposing the tiny threads by which Saban had moved its lips. "Tricks and lies! Have I not heard the Bergen and McCarthy throw their voices to make the very trees seem to speak? And you?" . . . he whirled to face the white-faced Vanil . . . "will believe such rogues above the word of one who loved you? Gods! What fools these men of Kef! I . . ."

A scream of warning from Zora sent him spinning about. Gurno, sword in hand, plunged toward him.

"Ah!" The American gripped his axe, in fierce exultation. "At last I am able to settle our old score! Come on, blackbeard! Heklos waits!"

He caught Gurno's blow upon his shield, drove the captain to retreat with a stroke of his axe. Back and forth across the dim-lit hall they surged, weapons ringing on armor, shifting, thrusting, parrying in a veritable dance of death. Warned by their previous meeting Gurno fought warily, seeking to tire the battered, weary American. Sparks flew as the weapons clanged, and between strokes Gurno shouted loudly for the guard.

Kirk was grinning now, a thin fighting smile upon his lips; muscles working like a galley's oars, he swung the double-headed axe. Already the captain was marked by several wounds where its razor edge had grazed his arms.

"Stand up and fight!" the American laughed. "Is this the courage of . . ."

A sudden movement from the shadows caught Kirk's eye. Gurno's retreat now became clear; he had been luring his opponent to the spot where Saban lay, hoping that a quick knife thrust might end the struggle in his favor. Even as this flashed through the American's brain, Saban, teeth bared in a savage snarl, plunged toward him, a gleaming dagger in his hand. Stooping low in an attempt to hamstring the American, bring him to the floor, the priest aimed a short chopping blow of his dagger at Kirk's leg-tendon. Vanil and Zora, breathless spectators of this struggle, gasped as at the same instant Gurno struck for Kirk's heart.

BOTH of the American's arms worked simultaneously, though in opposite directions. One, gripping the axe, flashed up to turn Gurno's stroke. The other, his shield arm, dropped, with all the strength of his great body behind it. Like a blow from a sledge the rim of the heavy bronze shield landed upon Saban's out-thrust wrist, striking the dagger from his palsied fingers. Bones snapped and the priest gave a howl of pain. Arm broken, dangling limply at his side, he reeled backward, groaning.

Yet quick though the American had been, Gurno had time to aim another blow at his adversary's unprotected chest. Impossible to raise the shield again before the curved sword could fall, nor, since he was off balance, to spring back, blindly Kirk swung the axe, determined to risk all on this one chance.

Now Gurno's arm was descending; he made no move to protect his side from the whistling axe, trusting in the strength of his armor. Of polished, reinforced copper, it would have been proof against most blows . . . but not the one Kirk aimed at him. Through armor, through bone the deadly axe bit, all but cutting Gurno in two. A gasping moan broke from the captain's lips; he toppled forward, dead before he hit the floor.

"Almighty Ones!" Vanil breathed. "Surely no mortal hand could have struck such a blow!"

"Mortal?" Kirk laughed, panting. "But you will hear!" He seized the groveling Saban, dragged him before the young king. "Speak, sorcerer, or I'll split your evil brain!"

"Nay!" the priest whispered. "I speak! This man is but a traveler, majesty, whom we conveyed while unconscious to Zora's rooms in order to bring about her downfall. It was my plan to create voices, supposedly of the dead, urging your marriage to my sister, Latu, that I might gain power. Mercy, Vanil . . ."

A clatter of arms drowned the priest's voice and the room was suddenly full of attendants, guardsmen, torch-bearers, attracted by the sound of the fray. In stark amazement they gazed upon the dead body of their captain, the huge, blood-spattered figure of Kirk, leaning like some god of battle upon his crimson axe.

"Remove this carrion!" Vanil motioned to Gurno,

and the groaning Saban. Then, with an arm about Zora's slim shoulders, he faced Kirk. "How can I repay you, outlander, for unmasking these two traitors, for restoring to me one whom I hold more dear than life itself?"

"Repay?" Kirk drew back the sable curtain before a window, studied the harbor of Thantis, dim in the cold, gray light of dawn. Breathing deeply, he filled his lungs with the sweet salt air of the sea. "Give me a galley manned by strong rowers, a captain who does not fear a storm! The dust of city streets clogs my nostrils and the far lands call."

"Only a galley?" Zora whispered softly. "Surely a small thing in this land of gold, of jewels, of spices! You wish nothing greater?"

"For me, whom men call the Wanderer, there is nothing greater," Kirk said slowly, and his eyes, as blue as the far horizon, turned once more to the sea. . . .

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 4)

comic presentation of H. G.'s "War of the Worlds." We say "comic" because of the big kick we who know, and knew, it was fiction, got out of those who believed it was gospel truth, and gave the newspapers the snappiest headline they've had in years, by starting a "panic."

Second is the movies, whose science fiction efforts have been "box-office" gold. We predict there'll be more and more of that type of picture. And when really big money is invested in tiny pasteboards, it'll be in science fiction "hits."

But third, and we think most indicative of where public fancy will be in a few more years, is the youth of the nation, who, this year, at the New York World's Fair, will hold a science fiction convention. Did we ever have a "western pulp magazine convention"? Did we ever have a "detective pulp magazine convention"? No. Then why a "science fiction pulp magazine convention"? The answer is simple. Science fiction is going to skyrocket into public fancy as something important enough to become the "rage."

MICHELISM is a term whose meaning has just been clarified in our minds: What is "Michelism" you ask? Well, America had better sit up and take notice, because here's the future government "catalyst" which is destined, if the intentions of Michelists become acts, to bring about the "revolution of science" and bring, not Technocracy, but Science-Government. We wonder, is Burroughs' story in this issue, prophetic?

OUR covers this month feature paintings by two old masters in science fiction illustrating. The front cover, by Leo Morey, amply demonstrates the ability that made him a favorite five or six years ago.

Artist Frank R. Paul, doing his second of the "life on other planets" series, exemplifies the vivid imagination of a favorite who has held the readers for more than thirteen

years. We predict that his complete series of paintings will be the most sought after collection in science fiction illustrating.

SPEAKING of artists, we might point to the work of several newcomers to **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES**, and of one newcomer to science fiction. Kenneth J. Reeve is the last mentioned, and we think, with his first illustration, he shows great promise of developing into a top-notch science fiction artist. The readers who have followed science fiction, and our companion magazine, **AMAZING STORIES**, know Robert Fuqua, who has skyrocketed to fame as the most amazing painter of gadgets ever to hit a cover. Jay Jackson, still new to the game, has a style with an intriguing difference, an artistic looseness that is a fine contrast to the technical rigidity of our popular Julian S. Krupa. All of these artists will be glad to know what you think of their work. Drop a line to the editor about the variety of artists presented in this issue.

IN our first issue, the popularity of the stories ranked as follows: 1—The Empress of Mars, 2—Adventure in Lemuria, 3—The Invisible Robinhood, 4—The Sleeping Goddess, 5—Revolt of the Robots, 6—The Mummy of Ret-Seh, 7—The Devil Flower. One definite factor stands out, and that is the adventure stories ranked tops. The leader was definitely an adventure story, and the runner-up also. The only scientific story to intrude was Binder's yarn of invisibility, followed closely by another adventure yarn.

This month, with our policy more definitely settled, we begin the first of our awards for popularity, giving \$75 for the leading story, and \$25 for the second in line. This is in addition to our regular rates, as a bonus for merit. You will find a coupon in this issue to be used in voting for the stories, as a basis for making this award. Support your favorite author by telling us his story is worth a prize.

YOU will notice the readers' department is enlarged over our first issue, as we intended it should be. This department is for you, and you are invited to air your views on **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES**, as well as on any other phase of science, or science fiction. It is a real controversial column and your editor isn't afraid to enter the fray.



A monstrous creature with bat-like wings flapped toward me and I fired desperately at it

SHE WALKED ALONE

by
**JOHN
RUSSELL
FEARN**

"Don't kill it!" my wife screamed as the bat-thing flew at me. Why should she prefer the life of a monster to my own? What horrible secret did she hold?

I MET Elaine Dodd for the first time in a country road in the Mid-west of America. She was seated on a grass bank at the side of the road, trying to do something with the heel of her shoes. In a moment or two my swinging walk brought me to her. I paused, surveying her with all a young man's ardent admiration.

For a few moments she did not seem to notice me and I stood taking in the slim attractiveness of her figure in its flimsy summer dress.

"Trouble?" I volunteered at last; and she looked up. For the first time I saw her face.

How am I to describe it to you? Can you imagine a face which is both young and beautiful, and yet unaccountably tragic? Conceive it as I saw it—satin smooth, with regular features and provocative lips, and with eyes which though so intensely blue, were yet the mirrors of a soul ridden with unspeakable despair. They looked at me through a mask like eyes out of a dream. I felt I was looking into her very being, onto the unexplained.

"I think," she said gently, in the oddest, far-away voice, "that my shoe heel has come off."

Shoe heel! So mundane a thing! I was jerked back to the prosaic and took the slim creation of soft leather she held out to me. Sure enough the heel had come off, ripped clean—but the nails were still there. In another moment I had my hiker's kit in the dust and pulled out a wad of tools. I guess my cobbling was pretty raw, but I did get the reward of her strange eyes as she tested her weight on the heel.

"Thank you so much. I rather thought I'd have to hop all the way home—back there . . ." She jerked her golden head to nowhere in particular; unless it was that great solitary residence I could see in the middle distance. Then she turned to look at me questioningly.

"Douglas Ward's the name," I volunteered, buckling my pack on again. "Lawyer in an up-and-coming way. Right now I'm on a hike; that's my idea of a vacation."

"Alone?" she murmured.

I nodded slowly, wondering what made me say, "At present—yes . . ."

"Strange," she smiled. "In this modern world of 1960 there are so many things one can do that make for company; so many friends one can have. And yet

you, like me, choose to walk alone . . ."

I reflected that I could not imagine why a girl so lovely and altogether desirable should walk alone, unless it was because a genial destiny had singled her out especially for me. Presumption? I am not so sure. I think you would have thought the same thing in my place.

"Maybe we have common interests?" I suggested.

She hesitated at that, then—Well, why must I dwell on the wealth of detail? We started to walk together. She explained that her home was indeed the one I had noticed, that she had lived there all her life—alone. Queer, such a rambling old place for such a young person. She had been out for a walk—as usual, alone. This was the first time she had spoken to a stranger for many years. Servants she had in plenty.

She stimulated my interest enormously. And those eyes of hers. . . . She was something more than just a girl. With the vaguest hint of hesitancy she told me her name was Elaine Dodd. I did not quite know at the time whether to believe it or not. Anyway, her name did not matter.

There was something rapturous about that walking with her down the long dusty road. There were no harsh sounds, no whir and rumble of the city; only the sighing of the warm breeze, the twitter of birds, the faint hum of insects. The sky was unbroken blue—blue as Elaine's eyes. The sun shone through her hair and turned it to a golden halo.

"Life," she said, "is so precious . . ." And she said it with such unwonted somberness, with such wealth of meaning, that I record it here in the hope it will impress you as it did me.

But that hint of tragedy? Why did she walk alone? That puzzled me immensely, but to all my carefully placed questions she had an evasive answer. But I did begin to feel she liked me. . . .

Later, I was sure of it.

WE were married two weeks after our first meeting. It was one of those whirlwind romances, and yet we were both in deadly earnest about it. I still had plenty of vacation left, and I had done pretty well in business, so we spent our honeymoon flying to different countries by swift air routes. . . . Throughout that honeymoon my love for Elaine deepened, even if I did not fully understand her even then.

She was, I found, unselfish, impulsively generous, given to intensely serious moods for no apparent reason; and yet I always felt there was something deep down inside her that wanted to find expression and could not. Try as I would I could not thoroughly focus her in my mentality. She gave me the impression of being fanatically determined to enjoy herself at all costs, and that demanded plenty of money. At least she had that. . . . Funny, but she was like a butterfly clinging to an ephemeral day.

I must admit to being astounded when she suddenly decided to cut short our honeymoon by three days. She suddenly became almost frantic in her insistence that we return to America, to her isolated home in the Middle West. Rather disappointedly I agreed, secretly disturbed at the haggard lines of anxiety that had come to her young face. Nor did those lines vanish throughout the journey home. She hardly spoke to me at all; and even when we reached her great rambling place in the country she was anything but sociable.

I had seen her home before of course; a legacy, I understood, from her parents. It was one of the few old-world residences left in the land. It was big and rambling, with monstrous cold rooms, vast expanses of grounds, and a staff of servants who seemed as mute as the grave except on domestic matters. A leathery old gnome by the name of Murdoch was the chief butler. In a way I liked him—but I did not like the house. It gave me the creeps. For the life of me I could not figure out why Elaine preferred to live in it. . . .

We were seated at dinner when I felt explanations were due.

"Just why did you cut things off dead when we were having a good time?" I asked her bluntly.

She looked up at me over the long length of table, gave a shadowy smile that somehow looked ghastly. Her face had gone incredibly wan. Then suddenly she got to her feet and came around to me, laid a hand on my arm.

"Douglas, you do love me, don't you?" she asked, very quietly.

"But of course I do!"

"Enough to trust me when I do not explain things which puzzle you?"

"I'm only a man, Elaine," I said simply. "I have my curiosities; my jealousies, if you like. . . . You're my wife. Some things, I know, are forever yours—but other things should be shared. Your behavior in the recent hours needs explaining. Why did you come back to this gloomy old dump? Why don't you come to town and let me fix up a good apartment? Sell this place!"

"No, dearest. . . . I can't do that." There was adamant decision in every line of her drawn face.

"Then what is the matter?" I insisted. "If you're ill, let me fetch a doctor. You look pale, over-anxious. . . ."

"I'm not ill. Just a bit tired. . . ."

"It's this damned place!" I exploded. "It's depressing! It must affect your health. . . .!"

I wondered why she smiled at that. I thought of the noise and lights of the city I loved, glanced around the barren, looming walls of the dining room. I did not want to be annoyed with Elaine, Heaven knows, but after all— Impatiently, I got up from my chair and strolled to the window, pulled back the curtain and stood staring out on the rising moon. I could feel Elaine's eyes upon my back.

"Elaine," I said slowly, without looking at her, "please try to see it my way! There's nothing here for us. Look at this view! We're shut away from the world! Open country, moonlight—"

"It's hideous!" she cried suddenly, in such a vicious tone that I swung round.

"What? The moonlight?"

"Yes—the moonlight. Everything!" All of a sudden she was worked up again, started pacing to and fro with one slender fist thumping into her left palm. "Why, of all women on earth, should this have to fall to me," she breathed, half aloud. "Why should I have to just snatch at life instead of enjoying it to the full? Why should—" She broke off, aware of my astonished gaze. Slowly she came toward me.

"Douglas, I thought when I found you that you at least would understand," she said, low-voiced. "I thought you would accept me without asking questions—that you would love me for love's own sake. God knows, love is what I need more than anything else in the world. . . . Ask nothing, my dearest, and accept as much as I am prepared to give. Strange bargain, perhaps, but. . . . Please!"

It was not possible for me to snap out a cold refusal when confronted with that beseeching look. I could sense something in her manner that was unbearably tragic; something that matched her anguished eyes. She stood waiting for me to speak; I could see she was trembling.

Gently I put an arm round her quivering shoulders.

"I make only one condition," I said quietly. "Some day, when you are ready, when it no longer matters, you will explain?"

"I promise," she whispered, her lips dry.

I did not tell her that I had made up my mind to probe to the very bottom of the mystery surrounding her. Nothing, I avowed, could so hold Elaine in bondage without answering to me. She was mine now. . . . Mine!

WHEN we retired for the night I had made up my mind to keep awake to see if anything untoward happened. Somehow I felt instinctively that something *would* happen. Whether it was the general ghostliness of the old house or Elaine's distraught, inexplicable mood I do not know.

But I do know that I failed in my good intentions. Perhaps it was the traveling, or else the heavy meal I had eaten: anyway, I found sleep claiming me irresistibly. Once or twice I did awake, too comfortable

to move, and was conscious in these intervals of strange impressions.

The moonlight was streaming full into the bedroom through the partly drawn curtains, and on one wakeful occasion I was convinced that I saw Elaine's slender form silhouetted, fully dressed, against the radiance as she gazed out into the night. I was about to speak when she moved away. Again I must have slept, aware through a blur of dreams of whispered words close by my ear, one sentence of which I could clearly distinguish. . . .

" . . . pray God that you will never know, my dearest. Trust in me—always! With that trust I may yet live, as I am entitled to live . . . "

Those words haunted my troubled slumber all through the night, and the next morning I questioned her about them over the breakfast table. But she swore I must have dreamed them; the effect of our conversation the previous night, perhaps?

I knew otherwise, but I did not argue with her. She was in a happier mood again, her eyes bright once more, even though the tragic look had not gone out of them. But at least her morose preoccupation and nervousness had left her. Maybe it was wrong of me, but as I sat tacitly studying her I dared to wonder if she took drugs. Had I, by some chance, married a girl addicted to weed chewing or something?

Damned silly notion! Annoyed with myself I left by fast car for the airport five miles away, intent on my first day's return to business. And thereafter for two months I found Elaine her old cheerful self. I forgot my original fears and suspicions and imagined she had probably had a fit of nerves or something. Several times she came with me to the city. We did numberless things; but no power of my devising could talk her into leaving that rambling old house in the wilds. Even to the expense of traveling she turned a deaf ear—so I gave it up.

It was two months to the day when I returned home an hour earlier than normal. Business transactions had finished sooner than usual and the remembrance that the car had behaved badly in the morning made me anxious to have time in hand in case it broke down going home from the airport. Sure enough it did, in the village.

I left it at the garage and set out to walk the remaining two miles home, arriving as the short autumnal dusk was settling upon the landscape. I could not imagine why, but my soul was weighed down with a grim, somber gloom. I felt a sudden aridness in the whole business of living; an intense fear for Elaine. . . . Then it passed. I decided it was the general heaviness of the air and the sight of that grim old house limned against the western sun.

Half way along the broad drive leading between the trees to the house itself I stopped dead, astounded to behold Elaine's head and shoulders, apparently disappearing into the ground two hundred yards ahead of me between the trees. It was a startling sight in that cold, pallid twilight. I dodged behind a clump of

bushes and watched her entirely disappear.

I cautiously advanced to where she had disappeared and found myself looking into a black opening with eroded stone steps below it. I hesitated a moment, then with infinite care stepped down them, crept softly into a pitchy darkness to find myself in a tunnel about six feet high and four broad. At the far end of it was a line of yellow light.

I listened, straining every nerve; could hear faint sounds.

AFTER a long wait I moved toward that yellow line with cotton wool quietness, noting as I went that the main tunnel had several smaller ones leading off it, handy for sudden concealment, anyway. . . . I reached the yellow bar at last and found it to be the light from two candles streaming through the crack between partly closed teak door and frame. Beyond was a cavernous dungeon, its walls glistening with mildew.

And there was Elaine, busily cleaning out a series of bowls like those used for goldfish. Around the bowls were instruments which I easily recognized as chemical retorts, burners, and similar paraphernalia. She worked with exacting precision, obviously determined that each bowl should be immaculate.

From this enigma my eyes wandered to something else by the far wall. I nearly betrayed my concealment with a sudden cry of horrified amazement. There in a glass case exactly fitting his body like a coffin, standing upright with his arms at his sides, was a man. He seemed to be clothed in leather jacket and breeches like an air-pilot—but his waxlike face and coldly staring, unblinking eyes told me in an instant that he was dead. And unquestionably he was human and not a model. What damnable alchemy was my wife engaged in?

Once or twice as she worked she glanced across at him—but there was no horror in her eyes, rather an immense tenderness and sadness. Even a faint smile plucked the corners of her mouth. Elaine, my Elaine, full of compassion for that embalmed thing? Rage, fear and horror all tried to get the mastery of me, but before I could take any action or burst in upon her demanding explanations she came to the end of her cleaning.

She looked once round the cavern, blew out one candle and picked up the other, headed for the door. Instantly I fled like the wind to the nearest tunnel and concealed myself.

She passed by the tunnel mouth, totally unaware of my presence, the flame of her candle flickering in the draft and sending bobbing shadows along the curved walls. I heard her footfalls recede, then there was a soft thud which proclaimed the lowering of a stone over the external opening.

Breathing hard, I yanked out matches and made my way to the teak door. To my surprise it was wide open. I had expected it to be impregnably locked? Was she going to return or was it left thus for some-

body else? I did not know. I entered the dungeon slowly and lit the solitary candle, stood looking round.

THE first thing I did was go to that glass case. The man inside it was flesh and blood all right, but he was preserved in the most flawless state. Somehow, as I stood there contemplating those firm, strong lips, fearless blue eyes, and shock of crisp fair hair—yes, crisp even in death—I was no longer afraid. Instead I was filled with admiration and suddenly conscious of my own shortcomings. Here was a man who had been young, intelligent, and a conqueror of unknown lands perhaps . . .

But how he came to be preserved like this? That was something beyond even the masterful science of 1960.

I moved away and looked at the workbench, at the immaculate bowls and apparatus. But there was no clue, and being no chemist, I could not understand the inscriptions on the bottles. There was nothing else save a chair and—My eye alighted on something on the wall, a huge blueprint transfixed with stainless drawing-pins to a drawing board.

The more I studied it by the light of the spitting candle the more puzzled I got—for it looked exactly like the theoretical designs I had seen from time to time of possible space ships of the future. The firing tubes were there in the design; the control room, the sleeping quarters. . . . Everything!

A space ship? Was it possible that Elaine had somehow been into space? Done something still two hundred or more years ahead? I suddenly recalled her bitter declamation of moonlight . . . Then the man in the case? For me the puzzle was assuming fantastic proportions, the place of honor of that blueprint and the elaborate efforts to keep it free of mildew and stain made it a dominant factor. But on the other hand, if Elaine *had* been into space why did not the whole world know of it? Had something she had seen in space given her that look of tragic horror? So I stood there speculating on high-flown theories, but gradually becoming certain of one thing. She *had* been into space—and something malignant was after her. That was it! It was something that demanded the presence of those glass bowls.

Queer how I talked myself into that belief; and yet how natural an assumption! I knew now why she would not leave this old house; at least that was one mystery cleared up! And it was certain that on that other night two months ago she had been down here. She *had* said those words to me in the night . . . Trust in her always! Trust *this*! For the first and last time in my life I felt an overwhelming hatred against her. Then it died. She was, I was convinced, enslaved by something against her will. Finally I resolved that I would say nothing but act when the moment arrived. This very night perhaps! And I would not go to sleep. On that other occasion Murdoch must have drugged my coffee.

I left everything exactly as I had found it, emerged from under the stone into the cold darkness of the night. It was about time for me to arrive home in the ordinary way in any case . . .

I SOON discovered that Elaine was back in one of her jittery moods, just as she had been when she had cut our honeymoon off short. I pretended not to notice her gloominess, her lack of conversation over dinner, the inhuman paleness of her face. I observed that her hands were trembling violently as she held her knife and fork. She ate little. Murdoch brought the coffee, but by various surreptitious methods I got rid of mine without Elaine noticing. Remembering my symptoms on the last occasion I began to feign an increasing weariness, aware all the time that her tragedy-ridden eyes were watching me with feverish brightness.

"I think," I said at last, getting up and stifling a yawn, "I'll go ahead to bed. Had a pretty heavy day today."

"Yes . . . Yes, I'm tired, too." She said that rather hurriedly; too hurriedly to be convincing.

So we retired. But by this time I was all keyed up, thoroughly alert, my heavy breathing only a disguise for my half closed eyes as I watched her bed next to mine. The light of the full moon once again shafted between partly drawn curtains. Outside the night air was dank and oppressive.

I felt again that grim premonition of the afternoon. Something was ahead of Elaine— I was convinced of it. I lay watching her twisting and turning incessantly, whether from over-anxiety or actual physical pain I could not determine.

Evidently she was quite convinced I was asleep for she started talking to herself in a low voice.

" . . . and the waiting—the endless waiting. The eternal hours. If he should not come this time of all others; what then? That life should hang by a thread because I have dared to do what no other woman has ever done . . . Why should it be so . . . Why? There must come a surcease from this endless struggle . . ."

I forgot to breathe deeply in the surprise of my listening. She turned abruptly to regard me. I managed a cough, a grunt, then I rolled over with my back to her and started to breathe heavily again. It was damned annoying because now I could not see what she was doing . . .

At long last she was plainly satisfied I was asleep for I heard her clamber out of bed. I could hear her dressing with swift, soft movements. I lay with my eyes wide open staring at the opposite wall—and for the briefest moment I saw a mighty black shadow cross the wall like the silhouette of a bat. From somewhere outside . . .

My heart was beating fast now. There had been something other-worldly about that shadow— The door closed softly. Elaine had left the room. In twenty seconds I was dressed, opened the door, and

hurried out into the passage. Then I stopped as lights gushed on and old Murdoch stood there, also fully dressed, an automatic in his gnarled hand.

"What in — What the hell's the idea?" I belowed at him. "Put that thing down, man! Help me to find my wife—"

"It's better you don't try and find her, sir—just yet." His voice was still respectful, but very firm. His dark eyes watched me intently from his parchment of face. "You're not leaving this corridor while I am here, Mr. Ward."

"Just what is all this about?" I asked him bitterly. "What's the matter with my wife? What is the secret that's wrecking our lives? Don't you realize man that I've got to know? I've got to!"

"I can't tell you anything, sir. She will herself later on, I don't doubt. As God's my judge, sir, it's better that you find out nothing! Leave her just this night— Then there will be no more secrets."

"You bet there won't!" I roared suddenly—and lashing up my fist with all my power I snapped his jaws together like a rat-trap. He dropped heavily to the floor.

I did not hesitate an instant. Snatching up his gun for my own use I pelted down the wide staircase, but to my amazement the rest of the staff had emerged from unexpected quarters. Lights blazed on; but I was ready this time. With my gun leveled I forced the lot of them into the kitchen regions, slammed and bolted the heavy old door upon them. Then I was out in the dark grounds, ploughing through sodden leaves and broken branches to that trapdoor stone. With some difficulty I found it, wrenched it up, and tumbled down into the tunnel. I took five paces toward the yellow light at the tunnel end—then I stopped in my tracks with my skin prickling as though electrified.

Something inhuman, ungodly was in the tunnel in front of me! I saw it come sweeping up against the yellow at the end. The reflected light shone into two green circles of blazing fire that I confusedly interpreted as tigerlike eyes. I was aware of an intense, overwhelming cold that struck to my very bones.

NEVER have I known terror so complete and awful. Unsupported, touching neither roof nor ceiling, the black horror sailed toward me. I had a vision of something that appeared to be half-octopus and half-bat—then I was fighting for my life in the midst of smothering, leathery folds.

God, how I fought! I fired the automatic time and again, blindly, staving off the death I knew was trying to reach me. I felt frightful claws miss my vitals by inches; my hand stung suddenly under the impact of merciless teeth. From somewhere the voice of Elaine was screaming—in a strange language! Only one word stood out amongst the jargon—

Ulsifa! I had not the least conception what it meant. Then she was imploring me.

"Douglas, don't! Don't kill!—! Don't!"

Don't kill! She wished that I should die and let this thing be victorious? Her voice came again, hoarse with anguish.

"Ulsifa! Ulsifa—!"

Her voice broke off in a sobbing moan as my last bullet found a vital spot. I staggered to one side, drenched suddenly in yellow fluid. The vile thing flapped weakly, released me, sank down like a deflated bladder to the tunnel floor.

Dizzy, smothered in cloying moisture, my hand lacerated pretty badly, I staggered to the doorway of the candle-lit dungeon. I stood looking at Elaine, nursing my hand. She was slumped in speechless despair in the solitary chair, her head buried in her arms as she rested them on the chemical bench. Her shoulders were shaking with spasmodic sobs.

"Elaine . . ." I whispered at last, "Elaine . . ."

"You fool!" she screamed suddenly, springing to her feet with eyes ablaze. "How did you ever find your way here? Why did you have to come here? Why didn't you trust me? You didn't have to kill Ulsifa."

"It was that, or my own death," I retorted.

Her anger died suddenly. With a face gone deathly white she stared in front of her. She reeled unsteadily as I caught her arm.

"Douglas," she said, in a voice so low I could hardly hear it, "you have killed me . . . too!"

"I've what!" I shouted.

She sank down on the chair again.

"HOW do I begin to make you understand?" she muttered. "Why did I not tell you in the first place—tell you that between me and death there lay two visits from Ulsifa? Now—it is too late!"

I caught her shoulders, forced her to look at me. I was afraid. I never saw anybody alive look so dead.

"Ulsifa was the only means I had of defeating death," she went on tonelessly. "Elaine Dodd is not my real name. I'm Helen Burke—and the man in the case there is Ronald. He was my husband. This was our home. . . . On July 10, three years ago, we went to the moon. We went with a small crew; now they're my domestic servants. . . ."

I glanced toward the blueprint on the wall.

"I never heard the name of Burke before, in that connection," I said quietly.

"It was mentioned in the press once or twice; for that reason I changed it on returning to earth. Ronald was one of the cleverest scientists that ever lived—and for that very reason he was sensitive to ridicule. He kept his invention as secret as possible until it had been proven a success. Only intimate friends knew about it. . . . So we went to the moon. . . ."

"Oh, Douglas, I cannot begin to describe to you the horrors of space travel! I cannot detail the agonies we endured, or the even greater horrors we encountered in the deep, unplumbed caverns of the moon. Deep down in those caverns there is air of sorts. We got our ship down into one of them and were able to explore. It strained our lungs—but we

managed. In the course of our adventures we were attacked by strange lunar insects, monstrous in size. Ronald died from the effects of venom, and I was pretty nearly gone too despite the efforts of our friends to put things right. Then I felt a sudden revival of energy. . . ."

Elaine paused and reflected, looked up at me steadily.

"A friendly creature, hideous in appearance but fairly intelligent and with the loyalty of a dog, had found us. Ulsifa was his name. I was frightened of him at first. . . . Then gradually I realized, as I began to understand his language, that he was the truest friend I had. He even hoped, one day, that union of earthly and selenite races might come about. . . . But most important of all he had the right antidote for the poison affecting me—a curious yellowish substance which he carried in a natural pouch on his body.

"Nature always devises ways and means to protect her creations, and Ulsifa's protection against the venom of his mortal enemy was a natural antidote for use when necessary. All his race was similarly equipped. The substance, which I found I had swallowed, had not entirely eliminated the poison, but it had at least temporarily stopped its ravages. . . ."

"Then?" I whispered, as she stopped.

"I found that in order to be thoroughly effective on flesh and blood the antidote needed refining chemically, a process I worked out with Ulsifa and the crew. My one hope of life lay in surviving long enough to refine some of the substance and having it in its raw state at two-monthly intervals. Only Ulsifa, of all his race, was prepared to help me. He, able to fly through the void and cold of space if need be, vowed he would come to Earth at two-monthly intervals and keep me alive while I worked the formula out with earthly chemicals.

"Then his first visit was when you cut our honeymoon short?" I asked quietly. "When you drugged me to sleep?"

She nodded drearily. "I had forgotten the date in the joy of our experiences; then suddenly I remembered. Ulsifa entered by one of the side tunnels and I left this door open for him. The side tunnels have an exit out in the fields. Tonight would have been his last visit. Everything was ready. Then you came! Ulsifa thought you were going to attack me. You fired a bullet into that antidote sac and . . . With it went my last hope of life. Look at the stuff—all over you!"

I GLANCED down my smothered sleeves and suit. The stuff had caked in, was streaked in dye from my suit.

"Useless!" Elaine whispered.

"But—but where is this space ship of yours?" I cried suddenly. "Let me find another Ulsifa and—"

"There is no longer a space ship. We destroyed it when we came back, determined that nobody should

ever endure what we had endured. Space is no place for a tiny experimental ship. It needs liners—the power of the future. It needs men of Herculean strength and endurance. . . . Not a woman.

"Oh, dearest, how truly I spoke when I said I walked alone. I knew I was facing death, but when I met you I resolved to take a chance and snatch at some of the good things of life in case Ulsifa failed to come. If I could keep my secret until the formula was worked out you would never have to know that you'd married a dying wreck, and not a woman. . . ."

"In Heavens' name, Elaine, why couldn't you have told me? I would have understood. Even as it was I found out—"

"I know," she said slowly. "But I was afraid you would misunderstand. I believed you would think I had married you as a last resort, and I did so want nothing to interfere with our love. . . ." She broke off and gave a hollow laugh. "So, I pay the price for curiosity," she sighed. "I gambled with death, Douglas; I tried to be a pioneer. Yes, I walked alone—And lost!"

Her voice stopped. She still sat there looking at me steadily. I began to feel my flesh creep a little. Not a movement of her face, not a tremor of her eyelids.

"Elaine!" I screamed suddenly. "Elaine!"

But even as I seized her, frenziedly felt for her heart, I knew the truth. There was no heart-beat; no breathing. And yet her body looked alive. As I stood there looking dumbly at her dead, beautiful face I heard sounds behind me. I turned stupidly as old Murdoch came quietly in, the rest of the staff behind him.

He took one long look at the girl, then he compressed his lips and glanced at me.

"She told you?" he asked quietly.

"Everything," I groaned. "If only I had known. . . . That thing in the passage there. Murdoch, we've got to do something! She's got to be brought back to life!"

He shook his gray head. "It's all over, sir, and perhaps it is better so. I have seen space; I know too what she must have gone through. The mental and physical anguish. . . . Maybe she's with him now. . . ."

"I have a letter signed by her, ordering in the event of her death that her body be placed beside her husband's in a case, both of them to be turned over to science for examination if necessary. All the facts are given, and the blueprint is there for engineers to work out better schemes. That girl and her husband gave their lives in the cause of science, Mr. Ward. You married a very brave woman. . . ."

"Of which the world knows next to nothing!" I breathed. "I shall never rest until the facts are given. Never!"

Slowly, still dazed, I turned toward the dungeon doorway.

THE END



WHEN TIME STOOD STILL

By EDWIN K. SLOAT

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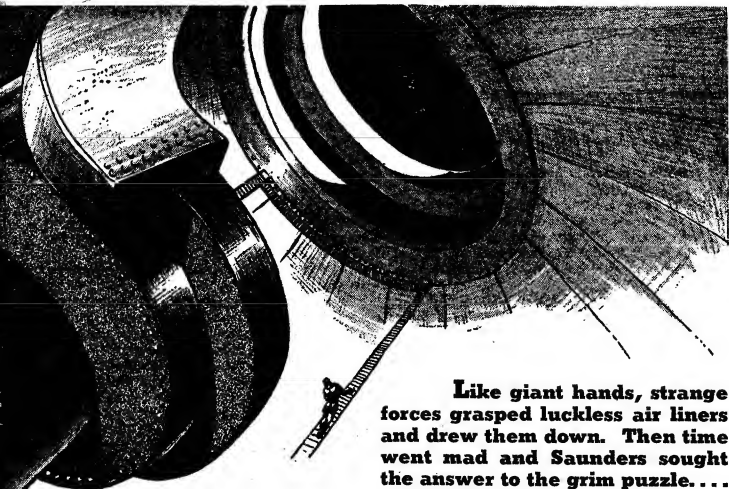
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"Keep going!" roared Thomas. "Get in there and clean out those rotors or I'll shoot you down!" Webb climbed desperately, his body buffeted by the suction from the giant wheel.



Like giant hands, strange forces grasped luckless air liners and drew them down. Then time went mad and Saunders sought the answer to the grim puzzle. . .

CHAPTER I

Death in the Air

THE plane, with its single passenger — few people dared to travel by air, or by any other means, after all the things that had happened — was far above the clouds, in the quiet reaches of the upper air, where it should have been safe. But the eyes of the two pilots moved constantly over the thick blackness of the storm below them, and their faces were tense.

Suddenly, with the quick hiss of indrawn breath, the eyes of the pilot at the control clamped on the altimeter.

"Look!" he shouted.

His partner's face went white when he saw what the instrument was doing.

"We're falling!" he screamed. "Falling like a stone!"

The motors still roared. Nothing unusual was visible in the sky around them. But the fabric of the ship creaked and popped as though it had suddenly been subjected to terrific strains. The pilots fought the controls, but the ship refused to answer.

The door of the control cabin was kicked open and the single passenger lurched in, clutching a brief-case crammed with papers. "We're falling!" he croaked.

"We're doing everything we can to stop it," the sweating pilots told him.

"You've got to stop it!" the passenger screamed at them. "I've got to get through to Washington. Got to!" You understand. The fate of every man on earth depends on my getting through to the president. . . ."

His screamed words choked off as a lightning flash played over the clouds like the finger of pointing doom. The passenger, his eyes goggling, stared at the nearing cloud bank. The pilots fought the controls.

Flopping, twisting, spinning, jerked this way and that, the silver ship, in spite of everything the pilots could do, disappeared into the boiling fury of the black clouds.

It never came out.

AN unmistakable grimness lay in the sombre, angular lines of Webb Saunders' face as he peered through the composition glass window of the high-flying plane. His slitted eyes roved over the grim panorama below him.

Black, boiling clouds met his gaze, clouds that stretched away in all directions, clouds that during the past three months had covered almost the whole surface of earth. With the clouds had come rain, hail, high battering tides, crazy sudden storms that swept from nowhere. Ships had sunk at sea and planes had crashed on land. Tall buildings had top-

pled down. And the best chronometers of the world's observatories had started losing time!

The foremost scientists of earth had tried to find a cause for the freakish storms, and had failed. If a solution was not soon found, human life was in danger of being obliterated. Even the offer of a million dollar reward had not brought forward a solution.

Webb's eyes followed the boiling clouds. He shivered, turned to Ethan Riley, who was piloting the plane.

"How much farther to where—to where the liner crashed?" he shouted.

Silently, Riley consulted his instruments and maps. "She was just over the border of Utah when she crashed," he said. "Almost where we are right now. And that was the third ship that went down in this region during the past few days. None of them have been found."

"We've got to find this one!" Webb Saunders blazed. "McDuff Traffern was the single passenger that plane carried. And he's the only man who has discovered the cause of all these storms!"

Webb held his voice down with an effort. Riley glanced at him, saw he was under great strain. "I'm with you, Webb," Riley spoke. "We'll find Traffern if he is still alive."

There was friendship and something more in Riley's voice. However they were more than friends. Companions from childhood on, Riley had chosen to go into aviation, while Webb Saunders had developed his early scientific bent to the point where he was assistant to McDuff Traffern in the Mount Wilson observatory. When Webb had gone to Ethan Riley for help, he had known he would get what he asked for. He had wanted a plane, and a man to fly it. Riley had the plane. And he could fly it. Even when Webb had told him that he wanted to search for the airliner in which Traffern had crashed, Riley had not hesitated.

"I'd like to know this much," Riley went on, his eyes constantly moving over the fury of the boiling clouds below the ship. "How do you know Traffern has discovered the cause of all these storms?"

"Lynn told me," Webb answered. And he thought of Lynn Carter, the blue-eyed niece of gruff old McDuff Traffern. She lived with her uncle. And she had been frantic when Webb left. Seeing those storm clouds roll beneath the plane, Webb was glad he had not yielded to her mad plea to come with him in this search for her uncle.

"I was down in Los Angeles all this week," Webb went on quickly. "Waiting for a shipment of infrared light ray photographic equipment. I got back at noon today. Lynn told me that while I was gone her Uncle Mac had been working day and night. This morning he came stumbling out of his laboratory, waving sheets of paper and croaking, 'I've got it. Incredible and impossible as the truth is, I've found the answer.' He radioed the president that he had made a discovery of the utmost importance, a discovery that

would necessitate the cooperation of the army and the air force, and that he was coming east immediately, by the first plane. Taking all his papers with him, he went straight to the airport and chartered a plane. As soon as the clouds lifted a little, he took off. I had no more than returned to the observatory and talked to Lynn than the radio told us his plane had crashed. I came directly to you."

Riley glanced at his companion when Webb mentioned Lynn. The aviator suspected that Webb and Lynn were a little more than the good friends they pretended to be. But he didn't mention what he suspected. He listened to Webb, and nodded slowly.

"Traffern knew something," Riley stated. "From what you say, I think there is no doubt but that he had made some startling discovery. But—" He looked at Webb—"I wonder if that radio message was intercepted!"

"What?" Webb sat up straight. His heart jumped with a sudden, heavy pounding as he caught the implication in Riley's words. "You mean he was killed to keep him from revealing his discovery?"

"That's exactly what I mean," Riley answered quickly. "I knew the men who flew his ship. In spite of any storm, they would have gone through. They knew their business, and their orders were to stay in the stratosphere, above the clouds. A fragmentary radio message got through from them. They saw no sign of an attacking plane. But their ship was out of control, falling from a mysterious cause!"

Ethan Riley jerked the words out of the corner of his mouth, and while he talked, he was constantly watching the clouds below him for a nameless menace that snatched ships out of the air.

WEBB SAUNDERS sank down in his padded seat. "Oh, Lord!" he whispered. "If Traffern was deliberately killed, then what we thought was an inexplicable storm period is in reality a definite plot of some kind against earth. And in order to solve what's happening, we have to fit into the picture such unbelievable phenomena as tidal waves, earthquakes, hurricanes, and—maddest of all—the fact that time, as measured by the most accurate clocks that science is able to build is apparently slowing down!"

"We've got to solve harder things than that!" Riley snapped, his eyes jerking from the boiling clouds to the instrument panel in front of him. "Look at that altimeter!"

The red hand on the dial had gone crazy. Like the blow of a mighty fist, the amazing fact was forced home to Webb. Although the motors were throbbing steadily the altimeter showed that they were falling at a rate of hundreds of feet each second.

Falling, falling, falling toward the fury of the boiling clouds!

Riley jerked the controls almost out of their sockets, kicked the motors to full power. Sweat

poured down over him.

"The air seems to have fallen out from under us," he shouted. "The props don't take hold! Neither do the elevators. . . ."

The ship turned over and over. Webb was thrown so hard against his safety belt that the heavy fabric cut into his body. He got one glimpse of clouds coming up to meet him. Then he was in the twisting fury of the mists. Jagged tongues of lightning leaped around him. The sharp crack of thunder echoed. And still the ship went down.

Around the ship loomed ragged, tortuous mountains. Riley missed a peak by inches. The plane was sucked into a side canyon. Then, with a rending of metal that sounded like a giant dog crushing a bone between its teeth, they crashed.

Webb's belt snapped. He was hurled across the cabin, and, as his head struck the instrument panel, he was hurled into the deep blackness of night.

CHAPTER II

Incredible Death

A RATTLING noise and the sound of a voice calling to him from a vast distance brought Webb back to consciousness. Grinding his teeth against the pain, he forced himself to sit up. He looked straight into the haggard, bloody face of Ethan Riley, who was bending over him.

"You all right?" Riley muttered. Webb managed to nod. He got to his feet.

He had been lying in the lee of the wrecked plane from which Riley had pulled him. The rattling sound came again. He saw what was causing it. Hail. Hard, white balls of ice sweeping down from the sky, rattling from the metal wreckage. Abruptly the hail changed to rain.

"Where are we?" Webb asked dully.

"Lost in the mountains in what looks like the graveyard of the airplanes," Riley answered. He led Webb around the ship, pointed down the slope.

Webb's eyes followed his comrade's pointing hand. Blurred and indistinct through the driving rain, he caught a glimpse of something that made him gasp.

"The wreck of an airship!"

Riley nodded. "There's another farther down the slope," he added.

"One of them must be the ship in which Traffern was traveling," Webb snapped. "He may be in the wreckage, badly hurt. Come on. We've got to get to him." Webb started down the slope.

"Not so fast," Riley protested. Webb turned, looked back.

Riley wasn't looking down the slope toward the wrecked liner. He was peering up, into the swirling mist of the low clouds, striving with narrowed eyes to see through the driving rain.

"What is it?" Webb whispered, struck with a sudden premonition.

"When I was dragging you out of our plane, I got a glimpse of something in the air," Riley answered slowly. "I couldn't see it very clearly, but it looked like a ship of some kind."

"A ship! Flying through this storm?"

Riley nodded. "I only got a glimpse of it. But it didn't have wings and the storm didn't bother it at all. It was poking slowly along as if it was looking for something."

Webb felt the touch of a nameless chill. A ship flying through the fury of this storm! A ship without wings! His eyes widened in apprehension. He peered through the rain. A white finger of lightning reached down from the sky and the mountains echoed with the rolling boom of the thunder. But nothing met his eyes except the swirling clouds.

"I guess I was mistaken," Riley spoke. "I got a bad kick when we smashed up, and I may have been seeing things that weren't real."

Webb felt a little better. Riley had been imagining things. No ship could live in this storm.

They went down the slope, toward the wreckage of the liner. Webb approached it with mingled hope and apprehension. What would they find in that ship? Mangled bodies in the wreckage? Even if Traffern was dead—he thought, with a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach—his brief case would be there. And the papers in that case would provide a solution for these mad storms that were threatening to smash all life from the face of earth. Fortunately the ship had not burned.

They didn't get to the wreckage. Fifty yards away from it, lying on the soggy slope, they almost stumbled over the body of a man.

Webb took one look at a face twisted with torture. Then he knew that he would never find McDuff Traffern alive. His heart racked in sick horror. His eyes revolted at the sight.

One arm and a part of the shoulder were gone. The arm had not been jerked or torn off. It had been seared off! The bones visible in the shoulder showed a brown sear and the flesh was cooked black. There was a gaping brownish hole through the chest. And the legs—the body didn't have any legs! Just below the knees, they ended in grotesque stumps.

Clutched in the arm that remained on the body, caught in an iron grip in the fingers—was the leather handle of a brief case. The case was gone. The burnt ground showed what had happened. The same weapon that had been used to kill Traffern had been used to destroy his brief case.

Webb read the whole story in a glance. Traffern had not been killed in the crash of the plane. He had tried to run from the plane, and something, coming from somewhere, had killed him, something that used no weapon known to the science of earth.

The chill of a nameless horror shot through Webb's body. In the flash of a second, he realized that the mad storms that had swept over earth, the astounding behavior of all the clocks on the planet, and the

death of McDuff Traffern had one common origin. Earth had been invaded!

As the stunning realization swept over him, he heard a humming roar rising above the howling of the wind. And Ethan Riley shouted.

"Duck, Webb! We're being attacked!"

Webb jerked around just in time to see a grim shape swimming down through the rain. A ship! An impossible ship that flew without wings!

It was coming toward them, driving down on them with relentless speed. Its occupants had sighted them.

Webb turned to run. He took one step. Out of the nose of the ship a streak of light lanced at him. He knew a moment of extreme torture as it struck his body. A wave of utter cold enveloped him.

He cried out, once. Then the torture mounted to hellish agonies and the cold seemed to freeze him through and through.

Abruptly, he sank into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER III

Pirate Ship

A POUNDING head and an aching body brought Webb back to life. He forced himself to sit up and was tremendously surprised to discover that his muscles obeyed his will. Two facts jolted him immediately.

One was that Riley was lying beside him. The aviator was just regaining consciousness. The other was that they were hurtling along in a ship of some kind, driving through fogs and rain, lifting over mountains.

Then he saw the hunched-over little monster pilot the ship within the all-glass nose, and he forgot all about his pain-racked body. His eyes opened in astonishment and a cry forced itself through his lips.

The pilot heard him. He locked the controls and turned to face Webb through the thick glass partition that separated them. In his wildest nightmares Webb had never imagined such a face and torso!

The creature was as squat as a dwarf, but as tall as an average man, though his heavy figure made him look short. Tremendous force lay in his powerful limbs, in the massive chest that swelled slowly. He had no neck, and a small, mushroom shaped head sat close on the round shoulders.

His mouth was huge and ugly. From his head weaving tentacles speared out. At their endings were glittering eyes.

Silently, the creature regarded him.

"Who—who are you?" Webb shouted.

The eyes gleamed wickedly. Metallically a voice came from a speaker set in the glass partition.

"Your comrades, whom we have captured; have named me Thomas," came the startling words, in distorted English. "That is as near as my real name can be rendered in your crude language."

"Thomas!" Webb knew he was gibbering. He tried to force himself to think straight. "Where did you come from? Where are you taking us?"

The eyes tilted up to scan the heavens through the transparent walls of the nose of the ship. Then they tilted down and Thomas refused to answer. But the gesture had betrayed him. He had come from somewhere up in the sky.

"I am taking you to Carlos, our ruler," he bit out acidly. The gargantuan mouth had an ugly way of spitting out words.

"Then there are others of your kind here on earth?"

"Yes. Many others."

The words stunned Webb. Many of these creatures were here on earth. Unseen, their existence unguessed, they had stolen in from the voids of space. What was their purpose? Webb asked, but got no answer. He tried another tack.

"You pulled our ship down. You smashed all those other ships. Why?"

"Because we are engaged in extensive construction work in this region, and we do not wish planes to fly over us. One ship we smashed because we intercepted a radio message—we keep a close watch over the ether—to the effect that one of your scientists had discovered the cause of the troublesome storms. Since we do not wish to be disturbed for the next two weeks, we removed Traffern!"

"Removed him!" Webb blazed. "You deliberately murdered him."

Thomas shrugged. "It was not our fault. We merely wanted to prevent him from revealing what he had discovered. After we had captured him, we would have permitted him to remain alive. We could have used him just as we are going to use you. But we discovered that he had broken a leg in the crash of his ship, and we could not use a man with a broken leg. So we destroyed him," he finished callously.

Webb shook with fury. McDuff Traffern, who shrank from killing a fly, had been destroyed because he had suffered a broken leg, and was therefore of no further use to the invaders! Webb boiled at the thought. He leaped to his feet and pounded his fists against the glass partition.

Thomas laughed at him. "You cannot break it. And even if you did, you would find this cabin very unhealthy for you."

His gesture indicated the faint fog that drifted about in the section he occupied.

"What do you mean?" Webb rasped.

"We don't breathe oxygen," the incredible answer came. "This cabin is hermetically sealed off from the section you occupy. It is filled with ammonia gas. This is our natural life medium, but to you, earthman, it would mean sudden, horrible death."

Webb shrank back from the partition. Appalled, he gazed at the drifting fog. Ammonia creatures! As all life on earth breathed oxygen, the invaders breathed ammonia!

With a sudden impulse, the warped monstrosity

that called himself Thomas turned and darted to the controls. Stubby fingers played over an instrument panel like the keyboard of a typewriter. Several things took place. A brilliant white beam shown down on the mountains, piercing the cloud mist and the rain, illumining the granite crags magically. The forward motion of the car slowed as the ship lurched to the detonation of a rocket tube above them.

"NICE people!" a weak voice rasped behind Webb. He jerked around. Riley was sitting up. The flier was trying to grin.

"I heard your conversation with your little pal up in front. Where is he taking us?"

"To hell, probably!" Webb answered bitterly. "Anyhow we're going down."

A great, black hole yawned beneath the space ship. Now they were dropping swiftly past rough-hewn walls of granite. Both men had the impression of being in a run-away elevator.

Far below, like a view of a well-lighted room seen through a crack, they glimpsed an unearthly scene, a vision that held their eyes. The ship dropped down toward it, slowed to a stop, and grated on the ground.

They were in the midst of the weird nightmare they had glimpsed from above!

Webb and Ethan were stricken with wonder. One hurried glimpse of the cavern revealed hundreds of feet above them, clouds of ionized gas producing a silvery light. To their left were great black buildings that resembled storage batteries grown to skyscraper proportions. To the right was a shining thing that seemed to be a wall forming the end of the cavern. A high, windy sigh came from the wall.

Dozens of the monsters like the pilot came running up. All of them were clad in awkward, transparent suits with bulb-like heads. Their pilot donned a similar suit, opened the door and stepped to the ground. He yanked open the door of their compartment, growled at them.

"Descend."

As they stepped out, a tall figure detached itself from the crowd of monsters. Instantly Thomas bowed. Webb and Ethan caught his snarled, "Prostrate yourselves before Carlos, Earthmen!"

"To hell with you!" Webb rasped. He was an earthman and men did not prostrate themselves to any creature.

The words died on his lips. A dull gray tube, held in the glowering ruler's hand, was pointed toward him. A stream of subtle force writhed through the air from the tube. A surge of bone-racking agony flooded through his body. Groaning, he sank to the ground. The agony passed, leaving him weak and nauseated. Ethan sat stupidly beside him.

The huge mouth of the ruler spouted words. "That is better. You may as well learn now as later that Carlos alone rules." He turned to the pilot of the ship that had brought them. "There were only two?"

"That was all. They were in one plane, flying di-

rectly on the same course as the liner. I followed them, remaining out of sight in the clouds, until they were brought down."

Webb, when he heard the words, felt a pulse of uncontrollable fury. He leaped to his feet, fists clenched. "You can't do any more than kill us," he choked. "And I'd willingly die to know the motive for what you're doing. You've caused the crash of at least four ships. You've murdered an old man for no reason except that his leg was broken and you couldn't use him after you had captured him. You've caused the loss of thousands of lives through the eternal storms you have created over earth. Damn you, I want to know: why are you doing these things?"

Carlos' frog-like face registered displeasure. He brought up the tube that he carried, pointed it, and Webb knew that his mad speech had brought him face to face with death. He held his breath while the ruler fingered his weapon.

Then Carlos shook his head. "I should kill you for your impudence, but killing you can wait until you are no longer of use to us. . . ."

Webb's already pale face went paler. He had just heard his death sentence. But before he died he wanted to know where these monsters had come from, and what they were doing on earth. Doggedly, he repeated his question.

"Since you can never escape to reveal the information," Carlos said. "I will answer your questions. . . . We came from a planet circling the star that you know as Sirius! . . . And our purpose in being here is to steal your world!"

CHAPTER IV

Theft from Sirius

"STEAL earth!" Ethan Riley echoed hollowly, rising to his feet, and standing beside Webb. "That's impossible!"

"Impossible to your barbaric world!" Carlos sneered. "To us—elementary."

Webb studied the ruler's heavy face. "You don't mean you are going to steal the planet," he said as quietly as he could. "You mean you are planning to conquer it."

"I mean no such thing!" Carlos snapped. "I have studied your language carefully during the time we have been here, and I know what I am saying. We are going to steal your planet, to remove it bodily from the solar system!"

Webb swallowed. In that moment he recognized the vastness of the science that was arrayed against them. A race with the knowledge and the power to lift a world from the system in which it belonged! It was inconceivable. And yet he did not doubt it was true. In spite of the stern control his mind was imposing on his body, his voice shook when he asked the next question.

"But why are you planning such an undertaking?"

Harsh, brassy tones answered him curtly. "Fifty years ago, in your earth time, one of the planets of the solar system of Sirius was struck by a dense comet that tore it from its position and destroyed it.

"The whole balance of our system was destroyed by the loss of that single body. Immediately all the other planets, including our home world, began drawing steadily closer and closer to Sirius. . . . We have known for years that something must be done to stop it. . . . And the only way we can stop it is to replace our lost planet, to restore the original balance of our system. . . .

"Our telescopes, vastly more powerful than yours, have scanned the heavens for a body that we could use. We found that body in your planet. Therefore we are taking it. We have already started moving it from its orbit. . . ."

As from a great distance, Webb heard Ethan Riley's choked voice. "What about us? What about the people of earth?"

And the callous answer came. "Your fate does not concern us. Unfortunately, you will not survive the journey through space. But that is a small matter. It merely saves us the trouble of hunting you down and destroying you as we would so many vermin!"

At that moment a vast humming echoed through the cavern. The tentacled eyes of the ruler turned up. The humming grew. There came the lashing of a sudden explosion, like the firing of a rocket tube. Automatically, Webb turned to look.

Another ship was coming down the huge hole that led to the outer air. Grating, it came to rest beside them.

Webb thought he had already suffered all the agony, all the shock, all the heartbreak, and all the despair that it was possible for one person to stand. But when he saw one of the figures who stumbled out of that ship he knew that he had only begun to suffer.

"Lynn!" he groaned. "I thought you were safe at the observatory. How did you get here?"

One of the persons who had descended from that alien ship was Lynn Carter, niece of gruff old McDuff Traffern, the man who had died in such agony back there on that mountain slope. She was here, in this hellish cavern under the earth, here where foul monstrosities gabbled insanely of impossible things. She was here. *Here!*

When he saw Lynn Carter stumble out of that ship, Webb Saunders was sick.

SHE heard his voice. Her startled eyes sought him out and she ran toward him. Then she was in his arms, sobbing. . . . "Oh, Webb . . . those awful creatures came to the observatory . . . after you

left. . . . They wanted to make certain that Uncle Mac had left nothing behind him that would enable anybody else to make the same discovery he had made. . . . They destroyed the observatory . . . obliterated it. . . . They killed the members of the staff who tried to escape. They captured Pierson, and Reynolds . . . and me. . . . Oh, Webb, where are we? Who are those awful creatures? What are they going to do to us?"

Webb started to answer but his words were drowned out by the bull-shout of Carlos.

"To the pits with them!" the ruler roared. "Before they die, let them learn what it means to work!"

"No!" Webb protested bitterly. "I'll go to your pits, whatever they are, but not Lynn. You can't send her. She's a woman."

Carlos' face was dark with anger at this defiance. "Man or woman, it makes no difference." He lifted the gray tube that he carried. "One more word out of you and I'll blast you where you stand!"

In the face of that deadly threat, Webb had no choice. Herded by Thomas, with his tube always ready in his hands, the two bewildered astronomers from the observatory, Ethan and Webb, the latter with Lynn clinging to him, began a sullen march across the barren surface. They passed into the huge, forbidding powerhouses, there was a terrifying moment of treading a catwalk over shrieking dynamos, and then they came into the great circular roofless building surrounding the pits. They passed a small pit, were forced to walk on the edge of the great circular hole that was being dug. Aghast they stood on the edge and looked down.

There was a sickness in Webb's body. The dryness of his lips seemed to go all through him, sucking the blood from his veins. The two astronomers were white. Ethan Riley narrowed his eyes to slits. Lynn gulped once, an involuntary, final tremor convulsed her body.

Webb could not tear his gaze from the scene. The shiny black walls of the pit sloped away from under their feet, dropped precipitously through solid granite to the bottom where forty or fifty men were dragging themselves about. They were working with funnel-shaped tools that sprayed greenish light on the granite. Wherever the light touched, the tough stone would slowly dissolve into choking fumes that rose in a mist from the hole. From where they were standing they could hear racking coughs from the men slaving in the fumes.

The harsh voice of Thomas ripped out behind them. "Here's your disintegrators," he snapped. "Go down to the bottom by the ledge. And you'll last longer if you don't try to use these disintegrators on any of us. They have a range of six feet. Ours are good for miles."

They took the small, heavy, funnel-shaped tools. Pierson fingered his uncertainly. Pierson was slight, and baldish, and he was so frail that a puff of wind would blow him away. Webb had known the little

*In the ruler's words is found the explanation of the mad phenomena that caused so much trouble on earth. The planet was being shifted out of its orbit! That shifting would cause high tides and earthquakes and the violent fury of storms due to atmospheric disturbances. It would cause the clocks of earth, measured for accuracy against the motion of the distant stars, to seem to lose time.—Ed.

astronomer for two years. He caught his breath when he saw Pierson fingering the tool that had been handed to him, and cried out a sharp warning.

The words came too late. Abruptly, gathering strength from some secret inward place, Pierson, ignoring the blunt warning from the Sirian, pressed the knob that controlled the discharge of the greenish ray and pointed it straight at Thomas.

The Sirian leaped back out of range. His face dark with rage, his tentacled eyes gleaming wickedly, he lifted his own weapon. Between it and Pierson's body shuttled a path of gleaming particles of matter.

Instantly a change came over the man. Webb gasped as he saw what was happening!

He was seeing Pierson as though he were made of jelly! His bones were visible as those of a skeleton. The jelly quivered into nothingness, the bones vanished with the abrupt suddenness of a light that has been turned out.

Pierson was gone. A little swirl of dust drifted where he had stood.

And Thomas was shouting, "Down to the bottom of the pit, or I'll blast all of you!"

The alien faced them, red tentacle eyes gleaming, his body hunched forward, his deadly weapon ready. Groaning, they trudged down the ledge. But Webb Saunders went with quickening pulse. He had seen something that might mean their salvation!

In the spot where Pierson had died there lay a gold watch, a gold ring, some gold dental work, and a gold chain. Gold was impervious to the weapons of the invaders. Armored in the rare metal, a handful of men might overcome them!

But where were they to get gold in this cursed place?

CHAPTER V

The Pit

AT the bottom of the ledge, a tall figure in a tattered uniform looked up at them. He coughed out the words. "Hello, Riley. . ."

Ethan Riley started when he heard his name spoken. "Gerrin! You piloted one of the liners that crashed ten days ago. How did you get here?"

Gerrin grinned feebly. "Probably the same way you did," he answered. "The air fell right out from under the ship. These devils can create a vast suction that literally pulls the air out from under a plane, and the ship, deprived of its supporting air, falls like a rock. Of course they could destroy any plane they wanted with their space ships, but they prefer not to do that, for the pilots would see them coming and radio a warning. Instead they lurk in the clouds and pull the plane down to earth!"

"So that's how they work it," Riley grunted.

"Yeah," Gerrin coughed. A fleck of blood appeared on his lips. He wiped it away and coughed again. "Lungs . . . don't last long . . . in these

damned fumes," he muttered. He shook his fist upward. "If ever I get my hands on you devils . . . Look out!" he shouted hoarsely, stumbling to one side.

A luminous path suddenly appeared through the mist. Gerrin staggered out of the way and the blazing light struck the granite. The tough rock cracked and blistered like burning paint, dissolved in a hole about two feet deep and the size of a barrel-head. The light winked out.

"That was Thomas," was Gerrin's sullen remark. "He thinks it's fun to lurk above us and pick off the stragglers. But if you keep on the move, you'll be all right. Be sure and keep moving, though, for he won't miss again."

Sullenly they began using the disintegrators on the stone. Reeling in the sickening fumes, coughing, they kept working. Lynn, now that her fright was over, now that she knew the terror they were facing, seemed to regain her courage. She kept her chin up, tried to stifle her coughs, and tried to smile. Webb's heart ached when he saw that smile. . . . He would have given his life to know that Lynn was safe at home. But she was here. *Here!* And even if she had been home, for how long would she have been safe? How long before the earth was swept away from the sun and the awful cold of outer space began to seep in through the blankets of the atmosphere, chilling, eventually freezing all life on the planet?

Not long, he learned from the workers. Not over two weeks. As soon as this pit was finished and the machinery installed in it.

Webb learned what was to go into this pit. A wheel! Nothing but a gigantic wheel!

"It's a gyroscope," Gerrin coughed out. "They've already got one gyroscope in operation, and they've used it to start the earth from its orbit, but they need two to break the gravitational force of the sun and hurl the earth, like a rock on the end of a string, out into space. . . ."

A gyroscope! Men had long been familiar with the strange force generated by a spinning wheel. Men had used that force, beneficently, to steady the plunging of their ocean liners, to hold their airplanes steady. Men had used that force for good. But it could be used for evil. It could be used, given a wheel sufficiently large, to hurl the earth out of its orbit. It was being used for that purpose!

"We've got to stop the gyroscope that is already running!" Webb rasped. "We've got to prevent them from installing one in this pit!"

Gerrin grunted. "Don't forget we're caught like rats in a trap! I've racked my brain ever since I've been here and I haven't been able to think of any way to stop these devils."

"What about these disintegrators we're using? Thomas said they only have a range of six feet. If there was some way to increase their range. . . ."

Turning it off, he began to examine the disintegrator. The funnel-shaped mouth gave him no clue. He was beginning to examine the heavy handle when

Gerrin saw what he was doing.

"Stop that!" the aviator rasped, his eyes jerking up through the fumes toward the top of the pit. "If they see you taking one of those tools apart—Duck! Thomas has seen you!"

Webb leaped to one side. The blistering beam bored down through the murky fumes and smashed into the spot where he had been standing. It followed him as he skipped through the fumes. Finally it was turned off. A hollow voice roared down at him.

"Keep working, earthman. Keep your disintegrator in operation."

Webb turned it on again, began beaming the granite. But from what Gerrin and the other captives told him—three men had been killed for attempting to examine the disintegrators—and from the sharp watch that Thomas kept over him after that, Webb suspected that there was a way to increase the force of the disintegrators. If he only had a chance to find it!

BUT he didn't have that chance. The hours slowly dragged by. Under his feet he could feel the throbbing vibration of a giant gyroscope that was turning somewhere in a vast hollowed out cavern. A gyroscope that, every second, was lifting earth farther and farther from her orbit. Soon there would be another gyroscope turning in the very pit where he was digging.

The knowledge that he was being forced to aid the vicious plan of the Sirian invaders was as bitter as the searing fumes he breathed. And every time he heard Lynn Carter cough, his sullen anger surged to greater heights. Somehow he must stop these devils. But how? If he could only examine the disintegrators. If he only had enough gold to construct an armor that would be impervious to their rays. If he only had some of the gold buried in vaults in Kentucky! The bitterness of that thought was gall to him—millions of dollars in the yellow metal lying useless, when it might be the one factor essential to save the earth from becoming a mere balance wheel in the solar system of Sirius, eight light years across the void of space.

Then a heavy figure loomed up through the fumes and a harsh voice grated. "You, earthman, we want you."

It was Thomas. His deadly weapon was pointing straight at Webb.

"What do you want?" Webb snapped. He tensed his muscles. If they were going to kill him, he would die fighting anyhow. A quick leap might carry him near enough to the bulky Sirian for his short range disintegrator to work effectively.

"One of the generators in the powerhouse needs cleaning," came the answer. "Carlos suggested you. Bring your work tool and come with me."

So they had another job for him! Webb did not need to be told that any job they had selected would probably be suicidal, that Thomas was ordering him

to his death. Grimly, he grasped the work tool, and preceded the watchful Sirian toward the edge of the pit.

Through the fumes a slender figure ran to him. "Webb! Webb! Where are they taking you?"

Gently he pushed her from him. "Haven't you heard?" he tried to grin. "I'm being promoted."

Promoted to his death, he thought, as he trudged to the ledge. But there was nothing to be gained in telling Lynn. She was already sick enough without knowing that he was probably going to his death.

As he neared the ledge he passed Ethan Riley. "If I get a chance, I'm making a break," he whispered fiercely, for Ethan's ears alone. "And if I succeed, I'll come back fighting!"

WEBB, with Thomas walking stolidly behind him, entered a huge building. Entering, his clothes were whipped fiercely by a mighty wind. A high shrill scream filled the room. The place echoed with the pulsing throb of mighty forces under leash.

Eight tremendous generators were lined up in a row. They towered at least ten stories high. Gigantic field coils circled around huge, madly whirling rotors. The coils rose up fifty feet in the air.

Thomas' heavy voice came dimly over the fury of sound that lashed through this gigantic cavern. "An unpleasant duty, but a necessary one. With your tool, you will climb the ladders through the field coils and clean out the dust that collects in them and threatens to interfere with the efficiency of their operation. In places you will find it hangs like stalagmites. One thing: Keep a firm grip on the ladder. The last man who tried to clean the coils, slipped and fell directly into the rotor beneath—perhaps you may find bits of him scattered through the coils."

And in the wake of his words, Webb was moving slowly to the ladder of the first generator, going to what meant almost certain death!

CHAPTER VI

Doomed

THE minutes stretched out into an endless interval of screaming wind, of dust-laden gales that threatened to tear his grasp from the ladder and precipitate him into the roaring rotor a few feet below him. His hair, his eyes, his nose were clogged with stifling fine dust particles, drawn inward by the force of the suction. Slowly he began using his disintegrator, blasting the dust that collected between the field coils.

Looking down he could barely discern Thomas. The Sirian was examining the cables that led from the generators. Now was his chance to see how that disintegrator worked. If he didn't find out—well, he had barely enough strength left to cling to the ladder. Another five minutes would see him slip into the rotor roaring beneath him.

Hooking an arm over a rung of the ladder, he com-

menced unscrewing the back of the funnel-shaped tool. On what he would find there, his life depended.

The back came off. The workings were simple. A battery of tiny tubes vaguely resembling a cathode tube sent a stream of destructive electrons down the funnel. Gingerly, with the back of the tool unscrewed, Webb pressed the trigger.

The same green glow came from the funnel. But, looking at the butt of the tool, Webb saw that all of the tubes were not working. Only about a third of them reacted! In a flash he was fingering the connections. He saw where wires had been disconnected from the tubes that did not react. He reconnected the wires. Once more he tried the disintegrator.

Tiny lights winked on in all of the tubes. And he could barely hold the tool in his hands as the recoil jerked it backward. Magically, a hole yawned in the iron housing of the field coils.

It worked! At full power! Its range had been enormously increased. Now he had a weapon that he could use.

Grimly, Webb screwed the back on the tool. New strength seemed to flow through his body. He turned, and disregarding the awful chances of slipping and falling into the rotor, worked his way back down the ladder.

Thomas had his back turned. The Sirian was still examining the cables.

"I wouldn't shoot a dog in the back!" Webb grated. "Turn around!"

The bulky figure whirled like a spinning top, hand leaping for his weapon. The tentacled eyes gaped in fear.

"This," said Webb, "is for McDuff Traffern!"

He pressed the trigger. A glow of bursting electrons leaped at the Sirian. They ripped into the bulky space suit that he wore, smashed through it, and into the flesh beneath. Webb felt a savage exultation as the clawing Sirian fell. The nauseous reek of ammonia that poured from the punctured space suit even smelled good.

Leaving the dying creature writhing on the floor, Webb dashed for the door by which he had entered. If he could get back to the pit and with his powerful weapon. He held the Sirians at bay while the captives changed their tools so they would operate at full power! If—that was his plan. He might die in the execution of his plan, but if he could tell the captives how to increase the power of their tools and could hold the Sirians at bay while the prisoners changed the connections, earth would have a chance to escape from the destruction that threatened it.

He dashed out of the door that led to the pit, took one look, and groaned. There were dozens of the Sirians between him and the pit. Even if they hadn't seen him, the odds against him were at least thirty to one.

"To hell with the odds!" he thought. "I've got to get through!"

With the tool working at full power, he suddenly sprayed the greenish ray over the Sirians. Some of them went down. But the others, alarmed at the cries of their fellows, whirled to face this earthman who had run amok. Their hands grabbed at their weapons. Webb sprayed them. A bolt of light lanced at him, missed him by inches. Another came.

He saw he couldn't get through. Certain death waited for him out there. He turned, raced quickly back to the protection of the powerhouse, and as he raced through the door he saw the remaining Sirians running toward the door.

He knew, as he entered the building, that he was running into a trap. His only hope was to go through the powerhouse. He raced between the massive, roaring generators, but before he got across the huge chamber, he heard shouts of Sirians coming from behind him.

"Maybe this will hold you for a while!" he thought, turning his weapon into the heart of the nearest generator.

IF he had pointed the gun at so much dynamite the effect could not have been more explosive. His ray ate the heart out of the whirling rotor, and the fragments, turning at terrific speed, exploded outward with the violence of a shell from a sixteen inch gun. They smashed into the roof of the cavern, sprayed the walls with shattering chunks of steel. The savage cries of the Sirians changed to wild alarm. Among the thudding fragments, Webb raced across the powerhouse, looked out, and saw—

Three small Sirian space ships. And the one nearest him was empty. A break at last.

With a silent prayer, Webb sprinted for the nearest ship. Unobserved, he climbed into it, slammed the door behind him, locked it.

Certain features of the controls were obvious. A rheostat for an accelerator, a lever for each rocket tube, the typewriter-like instrument panel that controlled the direction of flight. As he desperately tried to remember how Thomas had operated those controls, with cold suddenness his ears caught a cry from outside.

One startled glance he took. Sirians were streaming from the powerhouse. From the other direction they were running across the granite floor of the cavern toward him. And the crew of the other two ships had seen him.

He dived into the controls. He was not certain how the ship operated but he had no time to make sure. He began punching keys.

There was a blast from the back of the ship that sent it into crazy gyrations. In the floor beneath his feet, motors roared to life. And the ship leaped up, into the air of the cavern. Desperately he worked the controls, found how to change the direction of flight, and levelled off.

Below him, on the granite floor of the cavern, the Sirians were looking up. They were pointing disin-

tegrators at him. Only the erratic motion of the ship saved him from being struck.

He tried to turn back, to fly over the powerhouse and down to the pit. Somehow he had to get to those prisoners. With the ship he could hold the Sirians at bay long enough to tell the captives what to do.

As he yanked the vessel in a steep circle and started back, he saw the two Sirian ships take to the air from in front of the powerhouse. His way to the pit was cut off.

He was caught between two fires. He could not reach the pit with those ships facing him. The only other hope was to go in the other direction, to try to reach the huge hole that led upward to the surface. Grimly he yanked the vessel in another circle and as he turned he saw the black mass of Sirians blocking his way to the exit. Their disintegrators raised, they were waiting for him.

There was no escaping their fire, for they blocked the way to the exit. If he flew high above them, up near the roof of the cavern, they would be sure to get him. He sent the nose of the ship down, settled the ship into screaming flight a few feet above the surface of the cavern. He drew his own disintegrator and trained it on the waiting Sirians. They were stationary targets, he was a moving one. On that fact his thin hopes were founded.

Even as he pulled the trigger, firing through the glass of the control cabin, a beam stabbed at him, touched the ship momentarily. The ship lurched sickeningly, brushed the ground, leaped again into the air like a kangaroo. Webb fired through the glass. Ahead of him the Sirians answered his fire. From behind him ships blasted at him.

Only his speed and the crazy gyrations of the ship saved him. Holes appeared in the glass as the Sirian death rays struck. But none struck him and none struck vital operating equipment.

With the memory of that crazy bounce the ship had taken when it brushed the floor of the huge cavern, Webb decided on a desperate expedient. He was playing fast and loose with death, and he knew it, but there was no other way. When the Sirians were looming close ahead of him, he nosed the ship down again. The Sirians, thinking he was deliberately trying to crash in their midst, opened a lane. Webb held his breath. The ship lurched as it struck the floor of the cavern. Flying with the speed of a meteor, it struck the floor and bounced up! Up and over the waiting Sirians like a flash of light.

The mad leap disconcerted them, ruined their aim. Before they could bring their weapons to play on him, Webb Saunders was in the huge tunnel that led upward to the open sky, driving the ship outward like a ball from the mouth of a cannon.

Wild exultation shook him. He had escaped. He was in the tunnel heading out. Now men and ships could come back down that hole, with bombs and machine guns, and blow the living hell out of these invaders. With a groan he realized that no airship

manufactured on earth could fly in the fierce air currents in the shaft. Men could not fly downward. And they could not drop bombs from above, for the bombs, if they destroyed the Sirians, would also destroy the men held captive in that hole.

He had escaped! But even so, what could he do to thwart the Sirians? They were underground, in gigantic caverns. From the safety of that hole, they could work their gyroscopes. And nothing could be done about it. Even if he had escaped, even if he warned earth, the situation was still desperate. Then he looked back, and he saw that he hadn't escaped. Two Sirian ships were driving up after him.

CHAPTER VII

The Gyroscopes Are Finished

TO Lynn Carter the six days that passed after Webb made his mad attempt to escape were horrible nightmares. She did not know whether he had escaped or whether he had been killed. The Sirians told the captives nothing. She had one reason for even hoping that Webb was alive; for four days the Sirians had kept ships constantly on guard at the mouth of the tunnel. Then the ships had been removed as if all danger was past.

And the Sirians drove the prisoners mercilessly, forcing them to complete in less than half the allotted time their gigantic undertaking. Gerrin had gone mad. With a red spray coughing from his lungs, he had turned against the Sirians. He had been beamed to death. After that, Riley had stayed as close to Lynn as he could. The gaunt, coughing flier was trying his best to protect her. Always he assured her that Webb had escaped.

"He'll be back," Riley would say. "You couldn't kill that monkey with a lousy beam. He'll be back here with the army and the air force at his heels, and there will be hell popping in these parts!"

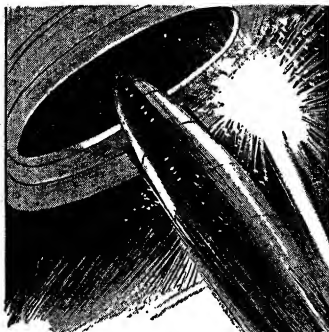
Lynn knew Riley was lying. She knew no aircraft could get down that tunnel, even if Webb had escaped.

The pit had been finished. On the sixth day the gigantic wheel of the second gyroscope was installed. The Sirians themselves worked with mad strength. And they drove their captives mercilessly.

The smashed generator had been repaired. Everything was finished. The second gyroscope, which was to hurl earth forever from the solar system, was ready to turn. Carlos placed his hand on the switch, ready to turn current into the vast mechanism.

Exultant cries of the Sirians echoed through the caverns. Their job was finished. Soon their system would have the much needed balance wheel. If, in gaining that balance wheel, they destroyed a flowering civilization, the Sirians did not care.

Carlos held up his hand. Except for the roaring winds and the throbbing of the vast powerhouse, there was expectant silence in the caverns.



"Our work is done," Carlos said. The wan prisoners, no longer in the pit, heard his words of doom.

Even as he started to press home the switch, a distant roar echoed through the caverns. Every eye glanced upward. Riley gasped. "My God, an earthquake. To be trapped in here. . . ."

Carlos slammed home the switch. Throbbing and humming the gigantic gyroscope began to turn. Hours later it would reach full speed.

"Time grows short," Carlos rapped out. "Even now the outer crust of your world threatens to crumble. Our work done, we will leave your bodies to guard this cavern." His loose-mouthed grin was watched by all the Sirians.

Then there was that low roar again. Every man's heart slowed. They looked. Swimming down over the powerhouse, exploding its rocket tubes in a sound that was the same as the low roar they had thought was an earthquake, was a Sirian ship, armored in gleaming yellow gold!

"IT'S Webb!" Riley shouted. "He's back, in a ship armored with gold and loaded to the gills with fighting men!"

Gold! The one metal that was impervious to the disintegrators of the Sirians.

Madness seized the caverns. Carlos bellowed orders. Sirians raced toward their ships, already drawn up and waiting for their trip from earth. Others grabbed their hand guns, waited for the oncoming ship.

All this Webb Saunders saw as he nosed his Sirian flier down toward the floor of the caverns. His veins flowed with liquid fire as he saw the culmination of

six days of desperate planning, hoping, fighting to construct an armor of gold leaf to turn the death rays. . . . One tiny ship, twenty men crammed in it. . . . Could they defeat a force ten times as large?

The ship grated on the floor. Webb kicked open the door, and leaped out, his fighters surging behind him. He carried the Sirian disintegrator with him. The others carried snub-nosed machine guns, hand grenades, all of the weapons gold plated. And all of the men were armored in gold from the vaults of Fort Knox, in Kentucky.

A roar leaped from the fighters.

"Give 'em hell!" Webb shouted. The thunder of Tommy-guns drowned his words. Hot lead thundered at the Sirians, tore through the bulky space suits they wore. Kicking and threshing the front ranks of the invaders went down.

The Sirians were massed into a solid block. Carlos lurked in the background, shouting orders.

When the stutter of the Tommy-guns came he shouted to his fighters to drop to the ground.

The front rank had already fallen. But the second rank took refuge behind the fallen bodies and from that protection they poured out a stream of green rays.

Then Webb Saunders was in the mouth of the tunnel that led to the open sky, driving the ship outward like a ball from the mouth of a cannon.



The ground boiled around the pitifully small band. Oddly, Webb noticed that wherever the rays touched his armor, it was scoured bright. He saw the Sirians taking refuge behind the fallen bodies and he lifted his disintegrator. He would blast those fallen bodies into nothingness. He squeezed the trigger. In the next moment he was jiggling it frantically. It would not respond.

He flung it from him. Somehow it had become damaged on the trip. The death rays, scouring around him, suddenly ceased. He looked up as he heard Carlos bellow an order.

Many of the Sirians were threshing on the ground. The odor of ammonia came to Webb's nostrils. But the Sirians who were not hurt were not answering the blazing fire of the earthmen. They were fumbling with their weapons. Puzzled, Webb watched. Then his heart seemed to stop as the Sirians brought their weapons into play once more, a peculiar red lens fixed on the end of each.

Shock struck Webb solidly as the death rays came again. He felt a tingling through his armor, above his right knee. Glancing down, he saw a pattern of tiny pin holes appeared.

"Lord!" he groaned. "Now they can pierce even gold."

The thought came to him that at least it would be quick. He waited the searing bite of the death ray. He had failed. He had brought twenty more men to their death. And he hadn't saved the earth! Desperately his glance roamed over the scene. He saw his own men beginning to fall about him, he got one glimpse of the prisoners huddling to one side. His gaze traveled to the side, to the powerhouse. . . . Powerhouse!

The word rang in his mind like a fire-bell. Powerhouse! Generators. If, before he died, he could only smash those generators. . . .

THE next moment he was running across the field toward the nearest fallen Sirian. Hot lead and death rays splattered about him. He fell twice as he felt the stinging rays reach through his armor and he discovered that they did not penetrate gold unless they were concentrated on it for a second or so. Behind him his men were making the same discovery and were skipping and hopping and firing at the same time.

Then Webb scooped up a Sirian weapon. He shot a bolt of force into a Sirian who tried to stop him. He saw the invader explode into green vapor. He thought of trying to finish the battle right here—and gave up the idea as a numbness crept into his arm. Swiftly he spun about and raced toward the huge powerhouse. Behind him raced quick steps. He flashed a hurried glance and saw Carlos coming behind him. Carlos had divined his intention, was firing at him from the rear. He tried to fire at the Sirian but Carlos ducked like a cat.

As Webb reached the door of the powerhouse, the steps melted away under him. He crawled over the boiling debris into the door, got one glimpse of the giant generators. He turned his disintegrator into the nearest one, and the explosion that followed split heaven and earth! A section of the ceiling crashed down, barely missing Webb. His lips were tight over his teeth as he ran toward the next generator. He took two steps forward and leveled his gun. Nor did he stop when the snarling voice of Carlos split through the thunder.

"Stop, you fool!"

Webb's head bowed under the blast of the weapon. A surging numbness shook him from head to foot. His brain reeled. As he sprawled downward an inner force made him whirl.

Carlos stalked nearer, raising his weapon to finish this earthman. Webb's weapon swept up. In the dim haze that danced before his eyes, he saw the green ray strike the Sirian.

Terror and pain convulsed the frog-like face into an awful death mask. Life rushed from his body as he sprawled downward to the floor.

Carlos was dead! Carlos was dead! The thought flashed through Webb's mind. But the generators of the Sirians still turned, and as long as they produced current, the giant gyroscopes would hurl earth farther and farther away from the sun. Webb tried to stand up, but found his legs would not work. Lying on the floor, he sprayed the disintegrator over the powerhouse.

The floor heaved with the force of the explosions as the spinning rotors ripped themselves free from their housings. The last explosion died away, as the last generator stopped turning.

FROM outside the powerhouse there came a vast humming. Webb crawled to the door. Only three of the twenty men he had brought with him remained on their feet. They were looking up.

Across the floor Ethan Riley came running toward him.

"They're escaping!" Riley shouted. "When the generators stopped they ran to their ships. If they get out of here, we'll have to fight them all over again."

Webb forced himself to speak. "Half the heavy artillery of the army is lined up outside of this hole. When those ships come out—they will run into a hail of steel that will blow them out of existence. . . . I fixed it up with the army so we wouldn't have to fight those devils again. . . ."

He sighed. A blackness moved into his vision, obscured his sight.

An hour later he returned to consciousness to find soft hands rubbing his face. He looked up into the blue eyes of Lynn Carter. Above her, he saw the grinning face of Riley.

"A whole world will be thanking you tomorrow," Lynn whispered. "All the gold it took to defeat Carlos couldn't pay you back."

Grinning, Riley added, "And the world of Sirius will curse the name of Webb Saunders forever." A sudden look of fear wiped the grin from his face. "You don't suppose the gyroscopes can pull us out now. They're still running, but they're slowing."

Webb shook his head. "It will be days before they stop turning. But their power is shut off and earth will slowly slip back where it belongs. . . ."

A sigh swelled his chest. "So far as we're concerned, those gyroscopes are just a symbol—a reminder that somewhere out in space a world is soon to die."

Riley shivered at the words. He looked down at Webb and Lynn. They didn't seem to notice him.

He coughed. They still didn't notice him. He coughed again. Webb looked up. "What's worrying you now?"

"Nothing is worrying me," Riley answered gruffly. "I just happened to remember there was a reward of a million dollars offered to the man who found what was causing all these storms. I was wondering what you are going to do with all that money."

Webb looked at Lynn. "I think," he said, "I know a way to use part of it. I'm planning to invest heavily in diamonds. . . ."

Lynn blushed.

"Oh," said Riley softly. "Oh . . ." The aviator walked away. He knew when three made a crowd.

« « STORY CONTEST » »

With this issue, the publishers of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES begin a new contest, to continue until further notice. To the author of the best story in each issue, we will award a first prize of \$75.00, and to the author of the second best story, a prize of \$25.00. One hundred dollars each issue to our writers.

And to our readers is given the task of selecting these winning stories. The coupon below, or a facsimile, completely filled out, will be the medium of judgment in this perpetual contest, and judging from the enthusiasm of our readers' reaction to a similar monthly contest in our companion magazine, AMAZING STORIES, we feel that FANTASTIC readers will come to bat nobly for their favorite author, and their favorite story.

So join in the fun, and do your bit for the kind of fiction you like, by giving the author of a really good story something to crow about, in addition to pocketing a nice big prize check, and buckling him down to turning out more of the same for your magazine. Read the stories and mark the ballot in order of preference, 1 to 6.

Announcement of the winners of this issue's contest will be published in the second following issue. Watch for the results.

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I rate the stories in the July issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES as follows:

No. Here

THE SCIENTISTS REVOLT	by Edgar Rice Burroughs
THE GOLDEN AMAZON	by Thornton Ayre
THE MONSTER FROM NOWHERE	by Nelson S. Bond
INTRIGUE IN LEMURIA	by Frederic A. Kummer, Jr.
SHE WALKED ALONE	by John Russell Fearn
INVADERS FROM SIRIUS	by Ed Earl Repp

»»» Introducing ««« THE AUTHOR

NELSON S. BOND

Author of

THE THING THAT CHANGED

IT is always rather difficult to stand off, as at a distance, and view one's own life and activities—but I am told, by some "stander-offers" that viewed from such an angle I live an enviable life. The reason for this being that, like an epiphyte, I have not succeeded, in my thirty years of existence, in "striking roots" anywhere—but drift from place to place, seemingly obtaining sustenance from the air.

My wartime boyhood was spent in several cities; Washington, D. C., figuring most prominently. Later there was a period of schooling in Philadelphia, following which a desire to be a civil engineer led me to the Eastern Shore of Maryland. The depression killed the engineering urge, but sent me back to school—Marshall College in Huntington, W. Va. Graduation represented a trifling change in my way of living, as it coincided with my marriage to the loveliest and swellest girl on the campus. Fortunately the new Mrs. Bond shared my love of travel and approved my desire to become a writer.

I started writing publicity for everything from pantywaists to picnic groves. Scratch off two years of this as wasted time and energy. Then came six months in Nova Scotia (spent extolling the virtues of this glorious little province as a tourist result) at the end of which I found, to my growing astonishment, that magazine editors were not only willing to use my publicity articles—but were paying me for them handsomely!

August Lenniger, one of authorism's finer agents, now entered the picture—taking young article-writing Bond in hand, and persuading him to turn fictioneer. There came a few months of fumbling, inept writing, and hard knocks—then we hit the jackpot. I started to click; stories in

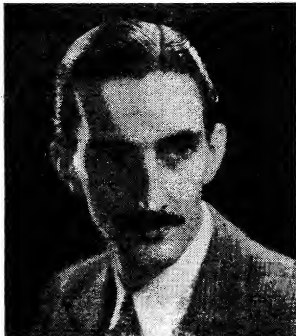
Esquire, *Scribner's*, inclusion in O'Brien's *Best Short Stories of 1938*, twenty-six weeks on the air with a radio program, "Mr. Mergenthwirker's Lobbies." And the number of stories sold leaped from an average of one per month to one per week.

Since the writer needs only his typewriter and elbow-room, the Bonds started traveling. Last year we lived in Augusta, Georgia. Right now, we have no home. We are

locating in or around Roanoke, Virginia, for the summer season—after which we may wander out, seeking new worlds to conquer. It is our plan to visit the sf convention at the New York World's Fair.

Thus the rough summary. As I have said sometime before in this column, I am tremendously gratified at the recent expansion of public interest in science-fiction, and at the brand new "style" of science-fiction writing which, within the past two years, has swept away the old, "I went to Mars and met a princess and did this-and-that" formula; supplanting it with human interest stories of credible creatures acting credibly.

I want to be with you readers often, and earnestly hope that I will win a place in your affections like that held now by such science-fiction "greats" as Merritt, Campbell, Weinbaum, and others. I do not seek to foist myself on you as their equal or their imitator; merely as another writer who loves this type of fiction and wants to do the best job he can.—*Nelson S. Bond.*



Nelson S. Bond

FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, JR.

Author of

DARK LADY OF LEMURIA

SO many stories have been written about Atlantis, but to me the possibility of a continent in the Pacific seems much more reasonable as an explanation of certain other-

wise inexplicable facts. Mongoloid faces in the carvings of Central and South America, statues of elephants, unknown to these continents, huge blocks of stone on coral islands of the Pacific, all tend to bear out the Lemurian theory.

In INTRIGUE IN LEMURIA I have tried again to get to the bottom of some of the old legends, the ancient beliefs anent witchcraft and magic. Could not giant octopi explain the ever-present legends of sea-monsters, or many-armed beasts of mythology? Hypnotism must have undoubtedly been practiced among mystics to conjure up images, just as the fakirs of the east use it today. And the teraphs, the mummified heads that were used as speaking oracles, would seem to have been the Charlie McCarthys of their day, operated by priests and medicine men who knew the value of impressing their credulous followers.

I hope this story pleases you, the reader, and if so, both the editors and myself would be glad to hear from you. Criticism and praise are our only barometers on the type of yarn you like and without them we must rely on our own not infallible judgment. For my part, I hope you will like INTRIGUE IN LEMURIA and will want to hear from Kirk again, from time to time, in his journey to the new world. With all best wishes for the continued success of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.—Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr.

THORNTON AYRE

Author of

THE GOLDEN AMAZON

CERTAINLY the character of Violet Ray is "Tarzan-*esque*" in origin—but there, I believe, the similarity ends. My main object in creating this woman was to devise a somewhat new type of heroine with the brains of a genius and the strength of an Amazon. Her original name came suddenly long before the story was even thought of. In fact I wandered around for weeks with only "Violet Ray" stuck in my mind. It was rather like a grin for which I needed a Cheshire Cat!

Piece by piece I fitted the story together, trying all the while to devise means whereby Violet Ray could step out of the ranks of the usual wise-cracking daredevil heroine and become something different. How different can only be judged when the story has been read.

To achieve what I felt was a necessary balance I made the hero rather negative in order to lend a stronger emphasis to Violet Ray; and a hero who is virtually at the mercy of the heroine is, anyway, a novelty. Usually these young men solve the most incredible things at lightning speed—a feat which has always struck me as unconvincing even though I am as big an offender as anybody!

I believe that if this Earth born, Venusian bred girl interests the reader, there are no limits to which she cannot go. In a story such as this, definitely experimental, one cannot altogether encompass a wide range of story because of the necessity of stressing the character. Once the character is established the latitude for adventure is enormously increased. So, whether Violet Ray continues her exploits or not, getting into deeper waters each time—for I have plenty lined up for her—depends entirely on you.

I confess I took something of a risk in making Venus her headquarters. So many people are on Venus these days since the great S. G. Weinbaum started the furor! Arthur K. Barnes and Henry Kuttner followed it up. I would

indeed have left the planet entirely to them except for the fact that it was only world suitable for the development of my character. I had considered Saturn, but its distance from the sun was the drawback. Mars also was out of it for the same reason. . . . Venus it had to be, but I have been careful to choose the wild, untamed parts of that mysterious planet so that I can be sure Violet Ray does not encroach on the land for which Gerry Carlyle and Anthony Quade hold the title deeds.

And anyway, if Violet Ray keeps on adventuring Venus will only be her port of call.

Last of all, do not think too harshly of the heroine's name. I know that in the best circles it is the *character* and not the name that should impress the reader—but if anybody can prove that a girl should not have the name Violet Ray (and be a quite ordinary girl at that), I'll jump publicly into the Atlantic Ocean and take my typewriter with me for an anchor!—Thornton Ayre, Blackpool, Lancs, England.

EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Author of

THE SCIENTISTS REVOLT

THE author of our novel in this issue was born in Chicago, on September 1, 1875. He was educated at Harvard School, Chicago, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass., and Michigan Military Academy, Orchard Lake, Michigan. He was married on January 31, in Chicago, and has three children, two of which have recently become science fiction writers, thus following in their illustrious father's footsteps.

His career included a term as Assistant Commandant, Cavalry Institute, Michigan Military Academy. He served in the 7th U. S. Cavalry at Fort Grand, Arizona. He was treasurer of the American Battery Company in Chicago, and department manager of Sears Roebuck & Company of the same city. Had a try at gold mining in Oregon, storekeeper and cowboy in Idaho, policeman in Salt Lake City, and many other varied occupations. He carries the rank of major.

His first novel, "Tarzan of the Apes," started him off on his writing career. He wrote this on the backs of envelopes and stray scraps of paper in spare moments, and when finished, submitted it to Argosy Magazine. It made an instant hit, when published, and sequels were demanded, with the result that "The Return of Tarzan," "The Beasts of Tarzan" and "The Son of Tarzan" followed at yearly intervals.

Perhaps the most important development in his writing career, so far as science fiction is concerned, came when he wrote his now famous "A Princess of Mars" in 1917.

Science fiction fans well remember the balance of the series, notably the sensational "Gods of Mars" and "Warlord of Mars." These science fiction novels appeared at intervals, spaced between new adventures of the most famous character ever created, Tarzan, the Apeman.

From Mars, Burroughs turned to his famous Earth's Core series, and from then on, came a deluge of novels of science fiction and non-science fiction, laid in every possible locale and imaginative world.

With "The Scientists Revolt" in this issue, we present the latest of his works to be published, something still different from anything else he's done.

Quiz Page

THE following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things fantastic and scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you, and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine. If you rate 60% correct in your answers, you are considerably ahead of the average.

WHAT'S YOUR ANSWER?

1. When you walk in your sleep you are known as a: mendicant, insomniac, somnambulist, polygamist, mesmerist.
2. The amount of heat lost by using gold or aluminum paint on radiators is: 1 percent, 20 percent, 5 percent, 10 percent, 3 percent.
3. A ligne is a: slide rule, television antenna, French measure of length, dual rudder system.
4. If all the colors of the spectrum were blended together it would turn out: brown, white, orange, black, purple.
5. To gain a maximum speed of 200 miles an hour a man would have to fall: 500 feet, 1600 feet, 1064 feet, 2000 feet, 10,000 feet, 1500 feet.
6. The noise made by crickets is called: cricketing, stridulation, singing, whistling, humming.
7. One of these statements is untrue: Some flowers attract bees by their color. Potato bugs fly. Magnesia is not a heat resisting material. Ambergris is used for making perfume.
8. Liquid air isn't on the market because: It can't be stored for any length of time. It costs too much. There is no use for it. It would explode.
9. Another name for a willow twig is: pussy willow, osier wythe, an flix, caragana, kalmia latifolia.
10. One of the rays given off by Radium is: Violet ray, Alpha ray, Death ray, Ultra violet ray, x-ray.
11. The name of element number 72 is: Alabamine, Virginium, Hafnium, Osmium, Ilinium.
12. The discoverer of antitoxin for diphtheria was: Pasteur, Buhring, Pusey, Dublin, Leeuwenhoeck.
13. To gather a pound of honey a bee travels: 50 miles, 100 miles, 43,000 miles, 13,000 miles, 25 miles, 10 miles.
14. To remove flesh from tiny animals, taxidermists: have assistants remove it, let ants eat it off, burn it off, cook it off.
15. The star that sends most heat to the earth is: North star, Alpha Orionis, Sirius, Pisces, Lyra, Cygnus.

SCRAMBLED SCIENCE TERMS

1. A language. NOBEMIAH
2. An insect. QUOSITOMES
3. An element. MIRGININU
4. The discoverer of nitrogen. DROFOTHERUR
5. A kind of tree. PESCRYS

TRUE OR FALSE?

1. A gallon can with a dent in it will hold exactly a gallon. True..... False.....
2. A kiloparsec is 6200 light years. True.... False....
3. Dry air is heavier than ordinary humid air. True..... False.....
4. A man can move a brick wall the slightest degree by pushing against it. True..... False.....
5. There is a star known as the Star of Bethlehem. True..... False.....
6. Calcium chloride will keep a cellar from being damp. True..... False.....
7. Ozonized turpentine will make paint dry quickly. True..... False.....
8. The smallest and weakest bone in the body is the Femur. True..... False.....
9. It is healthful to keep any sort of plant in a sleeping room. True..... False.....
10. An automobile tire will gain pressure on a long drive on a hot day. True..... False.....
11. Charcoal gas cannot be used as motor fuel. True..... False.....
12. It takes approximately 3200 cubic feet of helium to support 200 pounds. True..... False.....
13. A radio wave can be received from a greater distance at night than in the day. True..... False.....
14. An inch of rain means about 100 tons of water to every acre. True..... False.....
15. Heat prostration is more likely on a damp day than on a dry day. True..... False.....

STRIKE OUT THE WORD THAT DOES NOT CONFORM

1. Rhine, Danube, Volga, Erie, Po, Seine.
2. Gold, osmium, radium, platinum, tungsten.
3. Ebony, Prima Vera, Palisander, Lignum Vitae, Scrod.
4. Tangerine, Orange, Kumquat, Peach, Citrange.
5. Horse, Camel, Alpaca, Llama, Coyote.

STAR DUST

1. At what speed does the earth revolve around the sun?
2. What interesting feature is peculiar to Zeta Orionis?
3. What is the "cluster of Hercules"?
4. What is the significance of these three colors in stars: White, yellow, red?
5. What is the theory of variable stars?

PROBLEM

Three wheels have the same diameter, 48 inches, and are of the same weight, 200 lbs. One has practically its entire weight in the center within a diameter of 12 inches. Another has its weight principally in a six inch rim. The third wheel has its weight distributed evenly throughout the entire wheel. If they were started down hill simultaneously, and allowing nothing for friction, which wheel would reach the bottom first?

(Answers on page 96)

READER'S PAGE

SOMETHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

Sirs:

I wish to congratulate you and the rest of the staff for the marvelous work you have done in producing, "Fantastic Adventures." I have been a consistent reader of your scientific magazines for the past nine years, and I have always enjoyed them, but truly, this new magazine is "something new under the sun."

I feel sure that with a continuation of the policy that you and your co-workers have so far displayed that this magazine will soon take its place with the other first class publications on the market. In slang, this magazine is sure to become class.

Before I close, I'd like to say a word to the authors. Fellows, you've done mighty nice work in this first issue. Keep it up.

Fred. H. Krueger,
Buffalo, New York.

● We are glad to see that you agree with us in saying we have something new. And we'll keep on giving you something new. This issue will prove that, we think.—Ed.

BACK COVER SELLS MAGAZINE

Sirs:

Congratulations on the first issue of Fantastic Adventures—a welcome companion to Amazing Stories.

Features are interesting especially the fantastic covers done by Paul. As in the case of Amazing Stories these "rear" covers sell the issue to me. Must buy them to keep up each month with my science classes who are eager to start a discussion about the picture they saw there.

Quiz pages are good—and here's a tip to any Science teacher who might peek inside these mags.—save the Quiz pages as they make good material for your examinations and oral quizzes.

Continue the good work of such writers as Eando Binder. Would like to see another John Taine story in either Fantastic or Amazing. Hear that he has several unpublished stories.

Grant M. Paterson,
119 Linden Ave.,
Victoria, B. C.,
Canada.

● Your comment on Paul's back cover is typical. It has been given so much praise that we feel convinced future covers of this series will really create a sensation in science-fiction circles. You aren't the only one who saves these covers for reference.

Your tip on the Quiz pages is a good one, and we feel quite gratified that you find them so useful.

We'll certainly keep Binder, and John Taine is being considered at the present moment with a manuscript on our desk for reading.—Ed.

FISH DO SLEEP!

Sirs:

I have just purchased a copy of your first issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and I heartily congratulate you upon the make-up and appearance of the new magazine.

I notice, however, that in your "True or False" items on the Quiz Page you have made one very serious mistake. The question is: (No. 14) "Fish never sleep. True — False —" and the answer given is "True. They sometimes remain quiet in pools or streams, but they never sleep."

As a matter of scientific fact many fish sleep and sleep very soundly. Some even lie down to sleep and many change colors or markings, and while asleep differ greatly from their awake appearance. To be sure, fish have no eyelids and do not close their eyes while sleeping, but they sleep, nevertheless, and there are certain species which sleep so soundly that they may be picked up by hand without awakening them. If you will look in my book: STRANGE FISH AND THEIR STORIES, you will find on page 64 a chapter (VII) entitled, "HOW FISH SLEEP," which describes the sleeping habits of a number of fish.

A. Hyatt Verrill,
Springfield, Mass.

● Many thanks, Mr. Verrill, for your correction. We pass it on to our readers.—Ed.

VARIED REACTIONS

Sirs:

Spring is here and to add a fitting note to the general newness of things—we get a new science-fiction magazine!

My first reactions were very varied. The large size and trimmed edges were greeted with joy in my heart. And wonder of wonders, Mr. Fuqua turned out a highly acceptable cover for the new publication! I nearly collapsed when I observed the absence of the usual garish colors in the picture itself, but immediately recovered upon taking cognizance of that beautiful (?) border with which some allegedly well meaning person surrounded it. Why, why, why must your covers *always* resemble danger signals? I admit that you did remove the excess wordage from the picture, but it's still on the cover, anyway, which is just as bad. Please do something about this. *The only lettering that belongs on the cover is the title and author of the story the scene represents.*

The stories: Ah, now we have something! They rate as follows:

"The Invisible Robinhood" and "The Empress of Mars," by Eando Binder and Ross Rocklynn respectively, are tied for first. The former had a well-constructed theme very well worked out, and the later incorporated vivid description and a strong plot.

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It was superswell! "Adventure in Lemuria," by F. A. Kummer, Jr., takes second for no particular reason other than I liked it. The rest follow in this order: "The Mummy of Ret-Seh," by A. Hyatt Verrill, "Revolt of the Robots," by Arthur R. Tofte, "The Devil Flower," by Earl Vincent, and "The Sleeping Goddess," by Maurice Duclos. Sad to say, the illustrations are not very good. They seem to betray evidences of hasty execution, which indicates a necessity for more illustrators.

The back cover, by Frank R. Paul, is very nifty, although here again the background is full of red. I imagine that by now you realize that I don't like red in sf. covers, or at any rate I don't like it where it isn't needed. Aside from that, the painting is good. That Martian is a handsome looking fellow, I must say. But, kidding aside, he is really constructed very logically.

Robert Jackson.

● How do you like the cover on this issue? The lettering is cut to a minimum, and is just as you have suggested. Your comments on the stories are illuminating, and as a general rule, your rating is fairly accurate, at least as to the leading stories. As for artists, how do you like the variety in our current lineup? We have given you six artists in this issue. You ask for variety—there it is!—Ed.

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

Sirs:

Here goes for an attempt to take my eyes off the back cover long enough to write a letter.

After recovering from the very pleasant surprise of the large size, 96 pages, trimmed edges, and PAUL, I finally settled down to reading the stories.

You state that your policy will be to use stories covering all phases of science and fantasy fiction. This sounds like a good policy to me. There will be plenty of variety. At one end of the science fiction scale is the extremely scientific or E. E. Smith & Campbell type. At the opposite end is the A. Merritt type of fantasy. This latter type goes in for very little science explanation, usually none at all. It is, however, possible—

as improbable as it might read. Nowhere in this scale is the supernatural tale. This is in a class by itself and should not be used in a science fiction magazine. I like it, you understand, but in its place. Therefore A. Hyatt Verrill's excellent supernatural tale, "The Mummy of Ret-Seh," should have appeared elsewhere. Let's have Mr. Verrill turn out stories such as he wrote for the earlier AMAZING STORIES.

The back cover is Paul at his best. Paul, in his illustrations, has a certain "otherworldliness" sense that other science fiction artists seem to lack, as good as they are. His "Man From Mars" painting is more fantastic and more colorful than the front cover.

Concerning the front cover. I prefer that the illustration take up the whole cover with the magazine titles and story titles superimposed upon it. Inasmuch as there is a contents page, I see no reason why the cover should look like a bill board. The feature story title and two or three "big names" should be sufficient for newsstand draw. The right type of illustration is the biggest drawing card. Four color printing with its true black adds depth and sparkle to the covers.

The inside make-up would be improved if you would extend the illustrations into the page edges. In several of the stories in the May issue, you have done what I mean with the inner margins of the illustrations. This would make them even larger than they are now, and would give the magazine a "different" appearance. No other pulp that I know of does this. It's seen regularly in the slicks.

"Fantastic Inventions," "Fantastic Hoaxes," "Ray Holmes, Scientific Detective," and "The Editor's Notebook" are all interesting features. Since the "Readers' Page" will probably be enlarged in future issues, rather than reduce pages now used for fiction I suggest that you condense some of the features. No, I don't mean reduce their content. By using a smaller type, "The Editor's Notebook" could be complete on one page without cutting out a word. The authors' page could likewise be made to take up half its present space. Small print could be

used for the "Readers' Page" as well. The fiction is the thing, you know.

Wesso would be a good addition to the art staff of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.

Jack Darrow,
3847 N. Francisco Ave.,
Chicago, Ill.

● This letter from the fan who possesses the largest collection of science fiction in existence (letting myself in for something?) should bear weight. We appreciate your comments in such detail, including those we deleted to give other readers a chance to say something. Your point on weird stories is so well taken by you and others that it will become policy. No more weirds. Okay?

On the cover: Your comment on the smallness of the painting was reiterated by many. Result, we instantly change. You now have a full cover size painting, with the captions placed as judiciously as possible to satisfy our readers' desire. You see, we are going to give you what you want at every point possible.

Impossible: "Bleeding" the illustrations as you request. Mechanically impossible, in a pulp magazine. But maybe you'll find an inventor to invent a process for us, and then we'll do it.

What about that type size in departments, readers? We don't want to strain your eyes. So here's something to thrash out. Shall we use smaller type, in this and other departments, or stick to this kind? We warn you, it'll take a lot of letters to decide us to change.

Wesso and Finlay, among others, are being approached to aid our growing staff of illustrators in turning out the best illustrated magazine on the stands.—Ed.

WHAT'S THIS?!

Sirs:

Rocklynne's "Empress of Mars" best of issue and should be considered more nearly representative of Fantastic.

Dale Tarr,
817 Vine,
Cincinnati, Ohio.

Sirs:

I am writing about Frederick Arnold Kummer's "Adventure In Lemuria." I think it is one of the

best stories I have ever read. I write this with the hope that there will be more Lemuria adventures in the next, and many other issues.

Alfred Grossman,
527 Segal Street,
Philadelphia, Pa.

Sirs:

Congratulations on Amazing Stories' sister magazine. I particularly liked Maurice DuClos' "The Sleeping Goddess."

Frank Kock,
327 W. 17th Street,
Los Angeles, Calif.

Sirs:

I thought A. Hyatt Verrill's "The Mummy of Ret-Seh" was the best story in the issue.

George Aylesworth,
Box 686,
Mackinac City, Mich.

Sirs:

Binder's story, "The Invisible Robinhood" was by far the best. Wm. C. Malton, Jr., 27 Hartford Street, Dorchester, Mass.

● But why go on? It is evident that opinion varied widely, and your editor was given a real headache in determining finally which stories were liked best. The rating as finally deduced, appears in the Editor's Notebook. Next issue, we'll announce the line-up as it is estimated from the voting on the coupons this issue, and you know, of course, the lucky authors of the first and second stories will receive \$75.00 and \$25.00 respectively. But the editor hopes you don't give him the sort of headache the foregoing letters indicate.—Ed.

LIKES LARGE SIZE

Sirs:

The whole magazine looks like the best thing that's happened to science-fiction in a long time. First of all, of course, in the large size, and that's most important. The cover painting without lettering on it comes high, too (though the cover drawing itself was rather poor).

Among features I would suggest dropping are the scientific detective picture-story, and the non-scientific questions in the quiz. Many of these questions are just the ordinary every-day puzzles that are passed around, and have no place in a magazine

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reading  issue carefully and comparing? We'll appreciate hearing your reaction, and whether or not you think we "have something there." Try Burroughs, Bond, Ayre, etc., and "but" us some more. Next, the illustrations. Fast change, eh? More artists, more variety, and those brassieres not only back on, but graced in gowns. Okay? Third, the front cover. Here, also, is a great change. In short, your three objections have all been "batted" with butts of our own.

Your point about Fantastic not being the word don't sit right with us though. We think it is no more inappropriate than Amazing, which is *the* word in science fiction. In short, your editors believe we have the two best titles in the field. As for not being Fantastic, you wouldn't exactly call a story of the next century a "true" story, would you? It's fantasy, imagination, and everything else that pertains to the word Fantastic.

The Best in Science Fiction. *Both* Amazing and Fantastic are the best. We, the editors, believe it, and who would, if we didn't? And just read this issue. If you can pour caustic soda all over those stories, there're a lot of readers who have been drinking it for pink pop for a good many years!

Sure, we think you're caustic, but when we get a reader like you to come back and boost, as you hint you are willing to do, that's butter in our mouth.—Ed.

EVERY MONTH—
AND NOVELS

Sirs:

The new mag is excellent. I demand you put it out every month instead of bi-monthly. Also, I'd like to see a long novel in the next issue. Don't let Paul get away. He is your best asset. Quiz is good, so is Fantastic Hoaxes, but Scientific Detective is childish. Give us more readers pages. You are off to a good start. Don't you dare start to lag now.

Julius Unger,
1349 50th Street
Brooklyn, N. Y.

❖ Note Burroughs' novel in this issue. It isn't as long as most of his, but it is longer than anything we've published so far, in either *Fantastic* or *Amazing*. Every

month? What about it, readers? Would you like to see *Fantastic* every month? As for lagging, do you think we have, with this second issue?—Ed

AN AUTHOR IS ENTHUSED
Sirs:

Congrats on the new FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. The generous format takes me back to the days when all magazines in the then new fantasy field were that size; and it gives me some of the enthusiasm which I, as a beginner, brought to the fray as I tried to crack in.

Manly Wade Wellman.

● Thanks, Mr. Wellman, and we'll be watching for that new yarn about Hok and Oleana in Atlantis.—Ed.

EXCELLENT ADDITION

Sirs:

Judging from the first issue, **FANTASTIC ADVENTURES** will be an excellent addition to the fantasy publications.

You say that it took you a year to select and get together the format of this first issue. We sure hope it don't take you another year to find another such collection. They were really fine. I won't kick too much if the regular run of stories are only half as good.

N. Wilmoth.

Chelan, Washington.

● No, it hasn't taken us another year. We've got another contents page that will knock your eye out. —Ed.

APPROVES ARTISTS

Sirs:

Congratulations to Paul for the wonderful back cover and especially to Julian Krupa for his magnificent illustrations.

Paul Gerbracht,
1053 W. 25th Street,
Erie, Pa.

CAN'T CHOOSE

Sirs

I have just recently bought the first issue of your new magazine, and find it is everything you stated it was in your ad in AMAZING STORIES.

John Cunningham,
2050 Gilbert Street,
Beaumont, Texas

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22.00-26	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-32	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-28	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-34	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-30	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-36	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-32	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-38	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-34	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-40	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-36	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-42	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-38	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-44	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-40	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-46	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-42	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-48	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-44	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-50	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-46	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-52	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-48	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-54	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-50	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-56	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-52	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-58	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-54	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-60	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-56	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-62	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-58	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-64	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-60	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-66	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-62	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-68	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-64	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-70	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-66	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-72	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-68	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-74	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-70	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-76	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-72	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-78	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-74	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-80	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-76	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-82	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-78	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-84	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-80	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-86	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-82	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-88	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-84	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-90	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-86	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-92	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-88	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-94	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-90	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-96	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-92	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-98	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-94	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-100	1.5	\$28.00

Size **Alt** **Qty. Tires** **Size** **Alt** **Qty. Tires**

22.00-16	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-24	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-20	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-26	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-22	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-28	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-24	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-30	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-26	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-32	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-28	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-34	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-30	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-36	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-32	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-38	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-34	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-40	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-36	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-42	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-38	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-44	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-40	1.5	\$14.00	22.00-46	1.5	\$28.00
22.00-42	1.5	\$14.			

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BIG JUNE ISSUE

RADIO
NEWS

ON SALE AT ALL NEWSSTANDS

QUIZ PAGE ANSWERS

(Quiz on Page 90)

WHAT'S YOUR ANSWER?

1. Somnambulist.
2. 20 percent.
3. French measure of length.
4. White.
5. 1600 feet.
6. Stridulation.
7. Magnesia is not a heat resisting material.
8. It can't be stored for any length of time.
9. Osier wythe.
10. Alpha ray.
11. Hafnium.
12. Buhning.
13. 43,000 miles.
14. Let ants eat it off.
15. Alpha Orionis.

SCRAMBLED SCIENCE TERMS

1. BOHEMIAN.
2. MOSQUITOES.
3. VIRGINIUM.
4. RUTHERFORD.
5. CYPRESS.

TRUE OR FALSE?

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1. False. | 6. True. | 11. False. |
| 2. True. | 7. True. | 12. True. |
| 3. True. | 8. False. | 13. True. |
| 4. True. | 9. False. | 14. True. |
| 5. False. | 10. True. | 15. True. |

STRIKE OUT THE WORD THAT DOES NOT CONFORM

1. Erie. The others are rivers.
2. Radium. The others are the four heaviest elements.
3. Scrod. The rest are rare woods.
4. Peach. The rest are citrus fruits.
5. Coyote. The others are beasts of burden.

STAR DUST

1. The earth revolves around the sun at a speed of more than a thousand miles per minute.
2. There is a mysterious projection of "dark matter" which shuts off the light of stars and nebulae behind it.
3. The cluster of Hercules is a wonderful group of stars in a dense cluster. It has been estimated that the distance of this cluster is such that it takes the light from its stars 100,000 years to reach us.
4. It is assumed that red stars are the coolest and that white stars are the hottest. Therefore, white stars are "young" stars, and red ones are "old" stars. However, there are two types of red stars, and it is now believed the newest type is an extremely "young" star, just newly formed. Yellow stars are, of course, middle aged stars, and our own sun belongs to this category.
5. Variable stars are now assumed to be double stars, one of which is white, and the other red, so that when they eclipse each other, the result is an apparent dimming and brightening of the star, as each in turn intervenes.

PROBLEM

All three wheels reach the bottom at the same time.

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